

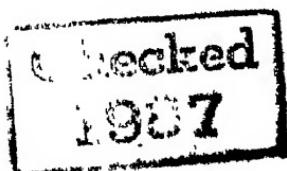
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THE LIFE OF
JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD

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JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD
After the bust by Epstein in the National Portrait Gallery.

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THE LIFE OF JAMES D. 56

RAMSAY MACDONALD

(1866—1919)

LORD ELTON

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FOR E W O R D

THIS is not an "official" life of Ramsay MacDonald. Such a definitive book may one day, I hope, be written by his son, my friend, Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, the present Secretary of State for the Colonies. But in the meantime there seems to be a need for an attempt to recount and interpret a career which has perhaps been more thoroughly, and indeed sometimes more deliberately, misunderstood than any in our recent political history. While I was writing this volume, I occasionally amused myself by asking some intelligent member of the public what he, or she, supposed to have been MacDonald's attitude during the war of 1914 to 1918. Without a single exception, I found, they believed that he had been a pacifist. Nor are misconceptions of this sort confined to the general public, as any reader of Mr. Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* may verify for himself.

In due course, when MacDonald's whole career can be seen in perspective, it will be realised, I believe, how potent and how salutary was his influence on the course of our history. The present volume carries the story down to the Peace of Versailles. It contains an account of his Spartan boyhood and his rise, against the heaviest odds, to political influence. We see MacDonald's genius for moderation shaping the early British Labour Party, an uneasy amalgamation of Trade Unions and Socialist Societies, into what in due course was to become a powerful instrument for progress and stability. There follows his lonely and desperate struggle throughout the war, not to hamper the national effort, but to ensure a

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peace which should be permanent. The crucial significance of those efforts, then so completely misunderstood by his fellow-countrymen, time is now most poignantly revealing. They contain many lessons for the present day.

This volume closes with MacDonald apparently at the lowest ebb of his fortunes. His long effort to ensure a clement peace had failed. Amidst the almost universal applause of his fellow-countrymen, he had been overwhelmingly defeated in the recent General Election. Execrated by the general public, distrusted or disowned by powerful sections of his own Party, it was widely believed, and hoped, that he would never return to public life. Yet in less than five years he was Prime Minister. Nor was that astonishing reversal of fortune a wayward freak of destiny. It was the natural consequence of the story which I have tried to record.

Much more, it may be hoped, will be learnt about MacDonald, particularly when his private papers are available for study. But already there is an immense amount of material, and much of it is from MacDonald's own pen. He wrote prolifically and spoke constantly, and on paper, or from the platform, would reveal himself as he seldom did in private conversation. Throughout his career he contributed articles, usually controversial, to a great variety of journals ; for years he kept a kind of weekly political and personal diary, in public, in the columns of *Forward*, and he wrote many books—and in particular the exquisite, and self-revealing *Memoir* of his wife, upon which any biographer must liberally draw. In addition to these, I am fortunate enough to be able to include a number of his unpublished letters, for permission to use which I am most grateful to their owners (and very particularly to Mrs. Bruce Glasier)

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as well as to Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, as his father's literary executor. I have applied for advice and information to scores of men and women who knew, or worked with, MacDonald, most of them busy and distinguished persons, some of them political opponents of MacDonald's, or of his biographer, and without exception they have spared no pains to tell me all they could.

I must not overload this brief foreword with a list of those who so willingly helped me for MacDonald's sake, but I cannot deny myself the pleasure of expressing my deep gratitude to my friend, Mr. William Blackwood, C.B.E., who, with characteristic generosity, placed at my disposal a mass of material which, at considerable trouble and expense, he had himself collected, particularly as to MacDonald's early days; to Mrs. Bruce Glasier, who not only allowed me to make use of the invaluable series of letters from MacDonald to herself and her distinguished husband, the late J. Bruce Glasier, but also lent me a complete file of that highly inaccessible journal, *The Labour Leader*, and other most useful publications; to Mr. Edward Pease, formerly Secretary of the Fabian Society, and long a member of the Executive of the early Labour Party, and Sir Alexander Mackintosh, formerly Chairman of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, who both took endless pains in supplying me with accurate information; to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Olivier, Mr. Bernard Shaw, Professor Lyde, Mr. Wilshire, Dr. J. J. Mallon, the Rt. Hon. G. N. Barnes, Mr. Coulson Kernahan, Mr. Spiller, Dr. Stanton Coit of the Ethical Church, Archdeacon Donaldson, Miss Isabella Holmes, Mr. George Kerr, the Rt. Hon. H. B. Lees Smith, M.P., Mr. David Kirkwood, M.P., Lord Allen of Hurtwood, the Rt. Hon. J. H. Thomas, Mr. John Beard, Mr. Jack Williams, the Bishop of Winchester, Mr. David A. Peat

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and the Hon. R. D. Denman, M.P. Also to Mr. Ivor Thomas, Miss Minnie Pallister, Lord Snell and Mrs. H. M. Swanwick, all of whom, besides giving me much information, lent me valuable documents or letters. And to Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Crewe, Sir John Simon and Mr. J. S. Middleton who were all good enough to allow me to consult them as to a particularly obscure political transaction. Many others have already permitted me to draw upon their knowledge and good will for information of which I shall hope to make use in a second volume of this biography.

In addition to the mass of material from MacDonald's own pen, and to information from his friends and associates, the principal sources for this volume are:

1. The Reports of the Annual Conferences of the Labour Party and of the Independent Labour Party. The files of the *Labour Leader*, *Forward* and other (for this purpose) less important journals.
2. Memoirs and Autobiographies. I have referred to many score of these, but it does not seem worth while to burden this volume with a hand-list of them. The *Autobiography* of Lord Snowden and Mr. Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* are the most important.
3. Biographies. Of these too I have had to consult a great number, but do not propose to enumerate them in detail here. Mr. William Stewart's *Keir Hardie*, and Mrs. M. A. Hamilton's *Arthur Henderson* are the most relevant. There is a biography of MacDonald by Mr. Hessel Tiltman (1929) and two studies by Mrs. M. A. Hamilton, republished together in 1929. Mr. L. Macneill Weir's *The Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald* is not a

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biography but an embittered attack. It devotes less than five pages to the years from 1906 to 1914, which contain the making of the Labour Party, and the core of MacDonald's Parliamentary career.

4. A certain number of special works. Particularly useful for certain phases of MacDonald's career are *An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol*, a pamphlet by S. Bryher, and *Builders of Peace* (an account of the Union of Democratic Control) by Mrs. H. M. Swanwick. *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain* by Joseph Clayton may also be mentioned.

If in this narrative I have occasionally referred to living persons, without the decorous Mr., or other prefix, it has been through no desire to be disrespectful, but because they seem to figure here as historical personages.

ELTON.

I

BEGINNINGS

1866-1885

DESPITE a widespread popular belief to the contrary, the village of Lossiemouth is not in the Highlands. It is as Lowland a community as Edinburgh or Dundee—a fact which, as will appear, was to be of infinite significance to the strange career of the boy who was born there in October, 1866. The vague boundary, only partly ethnographical, which divides Highlands from Lowlands, is far from running clear-cut from west to east. On the contrary, from the south-west of Scotland, where the Mull of Kintyre and the islands of the Firth of Clyde must be reckoned Highland, it runs roughly north-east, across Dumbarton and Stirling, to Inverness. And since *en route* it naturally pays no attention whatever to official boundaries, since moreover the cleavage, partly racial, is also partly the familiar dichotomy of townsman and countryman, some curious juxtapositions have resulted. The cities of Perth and Stirling are Lowland centres; within a few miles of either, thousands of the countryfolk are Gaedic-speaking Highlanders. Aberdeen is as Lowland as Hoxton; twenty miles up the valley of the Dee the population is a pure Highland breed. It is the same with Moray, and notably the same with Lossiemouth, a fishing-village on the storm-vexed coast of that country. Lossiemouth is Lowland; inland a few miles away rises a range of purple hills; a few hours' walk and you are in the Highlands. James Ramsay MacDonald sprang from a union of the neighbouring, yet sharply contrasted, stocks. His mother was a Ramsay,

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a Lowlander of Lossiemouth, his father a MacDonald, a Highlander from the Black Isle of Ross. The two strains were to conflict in him till the end of his days. He was to be both a mystic and a rationalist, a visionary idealist yet a soberly practical man of affairs, recklessly adventurous yet cautious almost to a fault. Himself a deeply religious man, for whom, as he was himself once to write of a dead colleague,

“the spirit . . . was the grand crowned authority of life,”

he yet worked enthusiastically for some years for the South Place Ethical Society, and was reluctant to have his children baptised. He was all but one of those whom he once himself described as

“the people who have not lost communion with the mystic things of life, the people of witcheries, the people who see in the dark, the people who are only half born into the delusion which men call Time and Space,”

yet he was a first-rate organiser who spent his working life among Blue-Books and Committees. He was a business man with the artistic temperament. On the political platform he was often the Highlander, excitable, provocative, self-forgetful and self-revealing, abounding in the poetic imagery appropriate to remote objectives. In the council chamber he was always the Lowlander, shrewd, shy, cautious, sparing of words, tolerant only of the practicable, a relentless master of detail, essentially a Moderate. Feminine in his sensitiveness, he could yet be as ruthless as a captain of industry.

“I saw,” says one who knew him in early days, “the subtlest casuistry against a background of transparent sincerity.”

There was a day, during the General Election of 1931, on



Photo: B. Wilken, Elgin.

SEATOWN, LOSSIEMOUTH

The house where MacDonald was born can be seen in the middle distance with a wall running alongside.



Photo: B. Wilken, Elgin

which the fog was so heavy that all the continental air lines ceased flying and no Royal Air Force machine was allowed up. Over the whole of Britain one machine, and one only, was in the air. In it was the Prime Minister. He was fighting the Election on a programme of caution.

Mr. A. E. Housman has written, with something perhaps of a poet's exaggeration, of the spiritual conflict in the heir of mixed Saxon and Celtic blood.

*In my heart it has not died
The war that sleeps on Severn side;
They cease not fighting, east and west,
On the marches of my breast.*

"War" perhaps is too strong a word for MacDonald's legacy. The conflict of Celt and Saxon did not so much divide, as equip his intellect. It made him many-sided, and not infrequently, it must be admitted, mysterious.

The squat but-and-ben in the sea town of Lossiemouth, in which James Ramsay MacDonald was born, stands close to the grey menace of the Moray Firth. In the long run, however, what mattered more to the subject of this history was that from it can be seen the far blue line of the Highlands, with Ben Rinnes over all.

* * * * *

Lossiemouth was a grim little village of fisherfolk and farmworkers. A street or two of small unlovely houses on the slope of a hill above the sea, an abrupt rockfall and, below it, more small grey houses within reach of the flying foam. But the setting is superb. To the north, beyond the Firth, the distant hills of Ross; to the south the rich Moray farms, sloping through wood and moorland to the Grampian hills; to the west more farms, more woods and the encircling hills; to the east the sea.

In spring and summer miles of the surrounding moors are golden with lemon-scented gorse, pink seathrift covers the cliffs, white gulls and white cloudlets sail playfully together in the vast blue sky. But autumn and winter last longer and seem more kindred to the place—when the wind screams, and under massed black clouds the ruthless seas are one heaving mass from Moray to the Pole. This village withdraws within itself. Outwardly, save for its courage, its patience under the lash of wind and wave, the place itself is prosaic. But in its surroundings there is all that is needed to stir the imagination; not only wild and changing beauty, but a long-descended and romantic history. Nearby, the ruins of Spynie Castle, ancient palace of the Bishops of Spynie, now a grey and pigeon-haunted shell; beyond it the superb wreck of Elgin Cathedral, built at the dawn of the thirteenth century; to the west, the Findhorn, and, in the strath above it, the graves of those who fell there six hundred years ago in the battle of the Lost Standard, and the Well of Randolph's Leap. There is Burghead, with its annual pagan rites, Burghead that was the ultimate stage of the Roman invaders, and Braemar Well, which once cured pilgrims of all ills.

* * * * *

Seventy odd years ago the sea town of Lossiemouth was a grey jumble of primitive cottages under a bare hill of rock, beside the sandy, gorse-strewn tract over which the Lossie struggles into the Moray Firth. Here, in one of a row of four squat two-roomed cots, with thatched roof, low doors, flagged floor and tiny windows of bottle-glass, lived Isabella Ramsay. The inner room was little more than a box to hold a bed. On the walls of the tiny outer living-room, always spotlessly clean, hung some Bible texts and a couple of gay grocers'

calendars. Its simple furniture shone with polish. For Isabella Ramsay was a woman of character. She is still remembered among her neighbours for her bright eyes and lovely voice, as well as for her courage, kindness and good sense. She was the daughter of a crofter named Allan. She married early a Ramsay, who followed the trade of baker in Lossiemouth, but the husband left his home one day, suddenly and for ever, leaving Isabella with four small children and no means. Nothing daunted, she set to, to fend for them as best she could. She would lend a hand with the herring-gutting, hoe turnips or lift potatoes on the neighbouring farms. And there were always the vegetables from the patch behind the cottage. She was a specially skilled needlewoman too, and made dresses and underclothing for women and children. There was often sewing to be had from the neighbours. And in the evenings, as she sewed by the fireside, she would pour out to her children the vivid, eerie Scottish folk-lore which had descended to her, unspoiled by letterpress or sophistication, from countless forebears and forgotten firesides. It was grinding, but not hopeless, poverty. All hung of course upon her resolution and her health, but oatmeal was cheap, vegetables plentiful and herrings twelve a penny. The family was triumphantly reared. Mrs. Ramsay had earned the respect of all Lossiemouth. Of the children, the boy Alexander took to the railway and became in time a passenger-guard on the old Highland line. The girls, Bella, Jane and Anne went into service.

Anne, the youngest of the family, is said to have been the most intelligent. She had had, needless to say, her schooling—this, after all, was Scotland. She had learned quickly to read and write, and from her mother's lore and her mother's strongly religious bent she had, no doubt,

learned far more. She was industrious and capable. She had beauty too, her mother's darkly-flashing eyes and a dignity of bearing which seemed to be hereditary among the Ramsays; in her late teens she is said to have been as comely a girl as could have been found in all Moray. Like most of the Ramsays, too, she was at once sunny-tempered and reserved. At thirteen or fourteen she took her first "fee" on a neighbouring farm. For her keep, and a pound or thirty shillings for a six-months' "term," she would work indoors and out of doors from dawn till dark. Only on fast days or the half-yearly feeing terms or at a rare week-end would she be free to tramp home to her mother and the sea town but-and-ben.

Early in 1866 Anne was working as housekeeper on the farm of Claydales in the parish of Alves, four miles out of Elgin on the high road to Inverness. The head ploughman at Claydales was one John MacDonald, a tall young Highlander from the Black Isle of Ross. Handsome and quick-witted he is said to have been, with a certain jovial recklessness in his bearing. It was not long before it was plain to the other lads on the farm that there was a special kindness growing between Anne Ramsay and the stalwart young Highlander from Ross. He would find excuses, they noticed, to relieve her of her household tasks; she would secretly fill his bowl with an extra portion of cream. In time they became lovers. And soon after Anne knew that she was to bear a child, she went back to Lossiemouth and her mother.

Once more, the two-roomed sea town cot was to witness a grim but cheerful contest with poverty. Once again the poverty, though it could scarcely be harsher, was never ugly. Once again there was no father to help.

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The two women would lavish on Anne's child their riches of character and faith, but he could scarcely have been born to fewer material advantages. He was to be three times Prime Minister of Great Britain.

* * * * *

An only child, tended so anxiously by two women of character, might have grown up effeminate. But though MacDonald's extreme sensitiveness may perhaps be traced to his early years (both praise and blame would mean more to him than to most public men) in most essentials he grew up—tough. And his physical courage would be as conspicuous as his industry, resolution and moral stamina.

He was not at first an easy child to rear. Perhaps no children are. There was a certain susceptibility to colds, which developed for a while in later life into a threat of something worse. But by the time he was five he had outgrown this weakness, and already showed promise of the good looks which were to distinguish him throughout life. A stage, in Scotland, of almost sacramental importance, had been reached; he must be educated. But where? Isabella and Anne found it a trifle difficult to decide. This was 1871, and Mr. Gladstone's Education Act was a year old, but it would be some years before a State School appeared in Lossiemouth. In spite of which, the difficulty, needless to say, was not that there were so few schools in Lossiemouth, but that there were so many. There was the Parish School, under the strict control of the Minister and the Parish Church. There was the General Assembly School, under the strict control of the General Assembly of the Established Church in Edinburgh. And there was the Free Church School, under the no less strict control of the Free Church Presbytery at Elgin. The boy's mother inclined

to the Parish School. The teaching there was said to be specially good. Isabella, however, was determined on the Free Kirk School. Her standards were less secular than her daughter's. Each Sunday she sat devoutly under the Free Kirk minister. Already Jamie attended the Free Kirk Sunday School. And the theology of the Free Kirk, as every one knew, differed significantly, differed indeed most controversially, from that of the Establishment. Come what may, Jamie must imbibe the true doctrine. In comparison with that paramount necessity, the difference, if indeed there was any, in the standards of secular instruction paled into irrelevance. Isabella was both a more deeply religious, and a more determined woman than her daughter. The harshness of her lot had never harshened her character. But though mellow, it was strong. She was indeed a most remarkable woman. Jamie went to the Free Kirk School.

The Free Kirk School—affectionately known to the young of Lossiemouth as “Robbie Codlin’s,” for the odd reason that a previous headmaster, with a passion, presumably for elocution, had habitually exhorted his pupils to open their mouths wide, “just like a codlin’s”—was presided over by a Mr. Charles Howie. Though sufficiently awe-inspiring no doubt to the youthful Jamie, Mr. Howie is said to have been both gentle and well-liked. For the purposes of this history, however, there are two facts about Mr. Howie which are of more interest than his methods in the class-room. One is that he had come to Lossiemouth from Kirriemuir in Forfarshire, where for a short while he had had to teach a shy, under-sized boy named James M. Barric. Many years later his two ex-pupils discussed Mr. Howie, “our legs doubled up on the benches” on opposite sides of a fireplace in the Adelphi. The other is that a year or two

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after Jamie had been committed to his care, Mr. Howie was drowned in Aberdeen harbour.

A new school had to be found, and this time, Anne and Isabella were agreed, there could be no doubt. It must be Drainie. It would mean a four-mile walk each way, but at eight the boy was strong for his age; it would also mean eightpence a month in school-fees, but that too must somehow be managed. On a frosty November morning, with a bag of books over his shoulder and a paper of bread and cheese in his pocket, the resolute little boy marched off to encounter the first lasting intellectual influence of his life. Not that at first he attracted any special attention from Mr. James MacDonald, the remarkable dominie of Drainie School. On the contrary, he sat for months, bright-eyed and observant, but not particularly noticeable, somewhere near the bottom of the lowest class. His first outstanding performance was not academic. It was the habit of the Lossiemouth contingent, about half the membership of the school, to wander home, after school was over, in dilatory and loquacious groups. In the course of an altercation, a fellow-member of one of these leisurely pilgrimages, named John Denoon, addressed an unforgiveable remark to Jamie. Jamie, though stalwart for his tender years, was not large enough to knock the offender down. He promptly picked up a stone, and hurled it with all his force. It was intended to hurt, and it did hurt. Denoon dropped insensible, bleeding from a nasty wound near the left ear. He was got home somehow to bed, where he remained for a week. His doctor pronounced that, if the stone had struck him an inch lower, it might well have killed him. Next morning the startled dominie cross-examined his small, and apparently homicidal, namesake. Jamie was obviously

frightened at what he had done. He readily admitted his guilt. He was very sorry that he had hurt the boy so much. But, he added, in an irrepressible burst of defiance, he would do the same and worse to any one who dared to repeat Denoon's insult. This spirited conduct not unnaturally earned Jamie the respect of his school-fellows, including, apparently, the unfortunate Denoon. As a mark of favour they called him henceforth "Donalie." The dominie, though he lectured the culprit severely, had not failed to note that he was a boy of character. He began to wonder whether he might prove to be a boy of intellect too.

The Reverend James MacDonald was a man of parts, and the system which he administered was both traditional and thorough. The great modern invention of free discipline and do as you please lay comfortably beyond the horizon of Scotland in the eighteen seventies. "The machinery," wrote the dominie's most distinguished pupil many years later,

was as old as Knox; the education was the best ever given to the sons and daughters of men.

The dominie was well aware that his flock would have little enough with which to face the world but their heredity, and what they learnt from him. He could at least teach them thoroughness and self-reliance. "The work done at the school," James Ramsay MacDonald was one day to write,

was of an old order now. It was a steady hard grind to get at the heart of things. We turned everything outside in, pulled everything to pieces in order to put it together again, analysed, parsed, got firm hold of the roots, shivered English into fragments and fitted it together like a Chinese puzzle, all by the help of Bain's Sixteenpenny Grammar. . . .

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Then every bolt in our intellect was tightened up. One of the dominie's generalisations was: 'You must master: that is education: when you have mastered one thing you are well on the way to master all things.' He was impatient with what he called 'new-fangled notions' both in educational organisation and method. . . . He groaned when the Time-tables began to bulge with items. 'It is not what a man knows,' he once said, 'but how he knows it.'

There could have been no sounder discipline for the innocent, but complex, Jamie. It was the Lowland strain in him, the potential captain of industry, which responded with grim satisfaction as, one by one, under Mr. MacDonald's discipline, the mental bolts were screwed tight. But it was the Highlander who pondered anxiously at night over the goblins, fairies and warlocks of the countryside, and on the tramp home scurried past the old churchyard "with bumping heart and hair on end lest bogles caught me unawares."

As time went on, Jamie was promoted to the select ranks of the more advanced, with whom the devoted dominie worked longer hours—half an hour before the rest arrived and an hour after they had departed.

Night after night and morning after morning we took the long walk with Latin books, or Greek or Euclid open in our hands, and we tramped to the rhythm of Amo, Amavi, Amatum, Amare or *τύψω*, *τέτυφα*, *τέτυμαι*. Then we knew the dominie. Then he showed us that patience, then he drilled us in that thoroughness, the discipline of which many of his pupils have carried through life with them.

Poverty and thoroughness, Euclid and the ancient tongues; characteristically Scotch, the discipline was certainly invaluable.

The boy was making friends too. There was the dominie himself, to begin with, with his ruddy face, soft voice and admonitory forefinger. He was a Tory of the Auld Kirk, but, of the three categories, to one of which almost any Scot can be relegated, he was a philosopher rather than a politician or even a theologian. Sir Walter Scott and George MacDonald were his literary Gods. It was Sir Walter indeed who first cemented a friendship between master and pupil, whose seeds had been sown on the alarming morrow of the assault upon Denoon, and which was to last through the life of both. Jamie was still among the younger urchins—it was only a few months after the Denoon adventure—and the dominie had been holding forth upon his favourite author in general, and *Tales of a Grandfather* in particular. Jamie sat spellbound. At the end of the day he made excuse to wait till all the rest had gone, and then timidly inquired if he might borrow the *Tales*. The dominie cross-questioned the small petitioner, and discovered that he had already devoured almost the whole of the diminutive library in his grandmother's cottage. Not that this, needless to say, was very extensive.

A great three-volumed Brown's Bible in sheepskin, a huge *Life of Christ* which I could not lift but whose back in green polished leather always attracted me, some collections of Sermons and a few books bound in black on theology and Church history, a volume or two of the classics in their original, and some tattered odds and ends, were all I inherited by way of books.

So MacDonald himself described it later. Classics in the original—for a two-roomed cottage it is a not unremarkable list. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Burns' poems and two then immensely popular religious publications,

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The Monthly Visitor and *The Gospel Trumpet* he had read and re-read. More unexpected was his intimate acquaintance and enthusiastic admiration for Goldsmith's illustrated *Animated Nature* and Hugh Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted* and Boston's *Fourfold State*, he admitted, he found somewhat heavier going. The dominie was delighted, and the boy went slowly home that evening, with his eyes glued to a *Tales of a Grandfather* of his own. Many years later MacDonald himself enlarged affectionately upon his early reading.

In the neighbouring city there were booksellers' shops, and thither I used to hasten to linger at their windows. My beginnings in general reading were made standing there, stealing from the pages of the books exposed to view what delight they could give me. I used to walk ten miles on Saturdays to do this. When I was the proud possessor of a penny, it was not to the booksellers I went, however. Their prices, even at their lowest, were not for me. There was a pawnbroker in the city, and he sold me his "rubbish" for next to nothing, and the lightest burden ever I brought home was Orr's *Circle of the Sciences* (who knows it now?) which I got with a few other books for one penny.

A notch was cut in my life when, in passing into a new class at school, my reading-book was one of the Chambers' Readers which was really an anthology from the great writers. To that class-book I owe peace and happiness untold. It was my first sip at the springs of English literature. . . . Thenceforth I knew the music, the colour, and the dignity of words, and the grand companionship of those who were their masters. Then two books came into my hands, each of which in its own way had great influence upon me. We had a ragman who went about pushing a barrow. He was reputed to have attended college, and as he went round with his bowls he often had an open book in front of him, stuck up against his crockery, from which he read as he pushed. We gave him a bad time, I regret now to

say, and we were anathema to him. One day I made bold to steal up and read his book, and became so absorbed that he caught me. Instead of getting the welcome with his foot or fist which I expected, he asked me in a kindly voice if I was interested. I said I was and asked for a loan of it. 'Take it,' said he, 'it will do you more good than it will me.' I bore away a volume of Thucydides in English. What a story! What men! What stirring tales and movements! How the long winter evenings sped! . . .

In the booksellers' windows I had read pages of Hugh Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, and one day an old battered copy became mine. . . . He taught me that life and time and work were precious. Being native to my own soil no doubt added to the influence of the book. . . . They tell me that the book is no longer read and that it has dropped out from the creative influences of the lives of our younger people. I can only hope that that which now fills its place is as valuable in imparting the energy of life and the habits of self-discipline and self-respect as *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. . . .

In these lists of books the observant may have noticed that, in spite of the natural preponderance of theology, there was, in Goldsmith, Hugh Miller, and the *Circle of the Sciences*, a slender but noticeable substratum of science. This taste for the exact—which it lay in the boy's heredity to match with his instinct for the mystic, the undefinable and the nebulous—he was soon to develop. He came across Samuel Smiles' *Life of a Scottish Naturalist* and Thomas Edwards' *Thomas Dick, the Thurso Baker*. The latter served to stimulate a growing passion for geology, which was to remain with him long after his school days had ended. He used to fancy, he wrote, that the Old Red Sandstone of the neighbourhood might be proud that Hugh Miller and his companions had explored it. Thanks to Hugh Miller and *The Thurso Baker*, two new horizons were opening for him. There

was the vast field of science, with all its promise of just that disinterested thoroughness, that lifelong pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, which the dominie was daily exalting. And linked with it, there came, one may suppose, the first whisper of ambition. Of science itself might it not be true, in words which he had heard from the dominie, that "the pupils who mastered it would master life and the world"? In the poor Scotch boy, beginning to suspect his own powers, there is apt to dawn a stimulating combination of motives; he is thirsty for knowledge because it is knowledge, but he cannot help wondering sometimes whether knowledge may not one day turn the world into his oyster. Meanwhile, added to Amo, Amavi, Amatum, and its discipline of thorough, this individual pursuit of another exact science was just what the boy needed to balance his mental armoury. As part, perhaps, of his Highland heredity, he possessed a natural gift of poetic imagination, a gift which needed little nurture at school, since the wild heaths, the haunted woods of Moray would nourish it, unasked. The arduous youthful training in precision strengthened other elements in his intellect, which, but for it, might have languished, under-developed. When asked in later life, at a dinner party of distinguished people, what had been his university, he replied, "Cassell's 'Popular Educator.'" This combination of a powerful natural imagination—capable both of rising to high poetry and of sinking at times to a nebulous blur—with an early training in scientific lucidity of thought is not uncommon among successful statesmen. Mr. G. M. Young has noted it in Gladstone, in whose history however the place of Hugh Miller was taken by Aristotle. Not that science was the young MacDonald's only passion. A fortunate chance soon enriched and widened his reading.

A consumptive watchmaker returned home to Lossiemouth to die. He had had a passion for literature, and had brought back his favourites with him. "Amongst them," wrote MacDonald afterwards,

were Dickens and Burns, Shakespeare and 'Elegant Extracts.' He doted upon them. When first I saw him he was sitting bent-shouldered, pale and thin, stooping over one of them. His white skeleton hands rested on its pages while he gasped for breath. I was afraid to approach him. I felt awe and dread for one looking so closely upon eternity. With feeble breath that he seemed unable to command, he told me of the pleasure he had from *Pickwick*. His cheek flushed as merriment strove to elude the grasping hand of death, and he had to pause, for his cough was sore upon him. At the end of each attack he pushed his dark hair from his brow, which he wiped with a large handkerchief. I saw the perspiration on it. Thus I was introduced to *Pickwick* and to Dickens. Whenever I finished one of the heavy volumes I took it back wrapped in a clean, white towel, and took away another. There was something in keeping with death when I handed the snow-white bundle to him and received another from his hands. When I had read the last I remember his remark: 'Aye! aye! everything comes to an end. Ye're a fast reader. I thocht the books would have lasted my time, but they are through afore me. Ye'll no stop here. Ye're no born for this plece. Ye'll gang South ane day, and ye'll maybe remember me and my books.'

Over all these stirring mental exercises presided the kindly figure of the dominie. To him the boy must have owed an incalculable debt. He did not forget it. "It is such a memory," he wrote many years later of his early teacher, "as one delights to carry through the world like a Talisman."

There were adventures outside the schoolroom too. On fine mornings to play truant in caves or bushes, and

next day to suffer the dominie's ruler, with stinging palms but without resentment. Or to see the doomed ship driving in upon the Skerries, the final crash, the parting timbers, and, next morning, the sodden bodies on the sands. The young MacDonald was an adventurer from the first. One of the few who could be relied on to swing the round of the nineteen trees which stood behind the school—they have vanished now—and never once set foot to ground, he was soon a leader among the schoolboy bands. Though sunny-tempered he was a notable fighter. From more than one playground or roadside quarrel he emerged a gory victor. At a local variety of shinty, played with whin-bush sticks, and prodigal of bruises, he usually led his side. In the battles of Indians and Palefaces, in the wood behind the school-house, he was both the most wily and the most aggressive of the Redskin chiefs. And inevitably in the mimic, but sometimes almost murderous, warfare between the youth of Lossiemouth and the neighbouring township of Elgin, he was to be found in the hottest of the fray. By common consent these pitched battles were usually fought in the appropriate setting of the ruined castle of Spynie. In one long-remembered Saturday affray, the besieged garrison from Lossiemouth had even armed itself with a miniature brass cannon, tight-packed with gunpowder and slugs. At the crucial moment this formidable weapon fortunately discharged the greater part of its contents to the rear, peppering its gunner's cheeks so liberally with powder that, awful retribution, he was unable to present himself at kirk next morning. But the monstrous concussion had momentarily filled the enemy with consternation. The assault wavered. With exultant war-whoops the garrison charged out from its sally-port, every boy armed with a pocketful of stones.

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Foremost among them, fiercely hallooing on his fellows, and discharging a stream of well-aimed flints at the now flying enemy, ran the future apostle of peace. The boy was a fighter, not so much because he was naturally pugnacious as because to the end of his life he always enjoyed taking a risk. On one occasion, unknown to its proprietor, he "borrowed" a neighbour's boat, and set out on a maritime *Odyssey*, on which he might well have been drowned. The owner greeted the culprit with a sound thrashing on his return, but the youthful mariner, who never resented the dominie's ruler ("we always felt . . . that the penalty was just and that the whole transaction had been good"); was not disposed to be so submissive to unofficial chastisement. On the spur of the moment he resorted to the tactics which had been so nearly fatal to Master Denoon, and hurled a stone with painful accuracy at the outraged elder's head. But there was a tender, an almost feminine, streak beneath the boy's high spirits. One of his young admirers, the son of a local gamekeeper, suggested—it was the greatest compliment he could offer—that he should instruct him in the ancient art of poaching. To this enthusiast, no doubt, Jamie's combination of adventurousness and intelligence seemed likely to make an ideal practitioner. Jamie had no objections to the risks or, it must be admitted, to the questionable legality of the proposal. Did he not once, when specially hungry, help himself to peas and beans from the parish minister's garden, a misdemeanour visited by the kindly Mr. Weir, who had caught him in the act, with the characteristic reproof, "You are the best Latin scholar at Drainie School, boy? Then translate into Latin for me 'Thou shalt not steal the fruits of any man's garden nor covet his beans and peascods.'" The two boys made and set some traps, but



Photo: B. Wilken, Elgin.

"Howie's"—MacDonald's first school.



Photo: B. Wilken, Elgin.

Drainie School

when at last the small, limp body of a dead rabbit appeared in one of them, Jamie suddenly informed his disillusioned partner that he felt like a murderer, and that he would never poach again.

* * * * *

Meanwhile at Drainie he was rising rapidly through class after class. To his schoolfellows, by the time he was fourteen, he had become something of an oracle. On the trudge to school in the morning he would correct their homework, and could often be persuaded to beguile the leisurely homeward ramble with eerie roadside tales. Sometimes indeed the tales were almost too eerie. There was one which described the bearing away of a fugitive murderer from Spynie Castle by the devil and his fiends, during a violent storm in the dead of some ancient night, which so impressed itself upon James Denoon that for years afterwards he could not see Spynie without a shudder. It was when young MacDonald was about fourteen that he was promoted to the extra instruction, half an hour before school began and an hour after it was over. Henceforth there was no more playing truant. The foundations of a lifelong habit of punctuality were laid. In later years the dominie would relate that, summer or winter, MacDonald was never late. Besides a quick intelligence, the boy, it was becoming obvious, possessed, not only a vivid imagination but, what is perhaps rarer, a powerfully retentive memory. Before he was fifteen, he was head of the school. Increasingly, the problem of his future perplexed the dominie. It perplexed the boy himself. It was high time, he felt, that he should begin to help the two devoted women who had hitherto supported him, unaided. Isabella and Anne were still clothing and feeding him out of their earnings. Yet even the modest school fees were a struggle. Almost from

the day on which he had set forth with the first eight-pence, a sixpence and four halfpennies, screwed into two wrappings of paper and tightly clutched in a fist inside his trouser pocket, Jamie had been aware of the strain on the slender resources of his womenfolk. This was a debt, and he must repay it. More than once he was on the verge of taking employment, such employment as Lossiemouth could offer, with the fishing boats or in the fields. He did indeed for a brief while begin work on a farm.

I found agricultural labour delightful work, and I never minded the hardness of it. Besides, a man is never the worse for hard muscular work. At that time, I was struck with the fine lot of the ploughmen who lived about us. Every one of them knew his Burns nearly by heart, as well as his Bible. Besides, they used nearly all to try their hands at making their own songs, and in the autumn, the whole countryside seemed alive with whistling when the ploughmen started ploughing. You could hear them, too, across field after field, singing as they laboured.

Years later, H. M. Hyndman, the frock-coated Etonian parent of British Marxism, was to sneer at MacDonald because, like Hyndman himself, he had never been a manual labourer. If Hyndman meant that MacDonald had never been poor, he was grotesquely deceived. If the taunt implied that he was not qualified to lead a Labour Party because his experience had not taught him to understand labourers, the passage just quoted strikingly refutes it.

But Isabella and Anne would not hear of permanent employment in the fields. They knew the value of education even better than they knew its cost. And they were convinced by now that the boy's destiny was not to mend nets or to follow a plough. Had not Anne paid

B E G I N N I N G S

secret visits to Drainie to inquire of his progress? Had he not won one of the “Morayshire Prizes”? And, better than school reports or prizes, was there not something rare about him, something *different*? When Jamie was about sixteen, the problem was temporarily solved. The dominie invited him to become a pupil-teacher. Anne lived to see her son a well-known Member of Parliament, but it is possible that none of his subsequent achievements gave her so much pleasure as this first of them. For a year or two the salary of a pupil-teacher would be only seven pounds ten a year, but it would pay for his clothes and books, perhaps. And, uplifting thought, he would be a teacher! The two women insisted on fitting him out with a brand new suit for his first day in the new post.

And now the young MacDonald’s intellectual interests were rapidly expanding. Consciously or unconsciously, he was beginning to prepare himself for a wider world. There was still the dominie and his discipline of thorough; for the pupil-teacher was still permitted that half-hour before, that hour after, the lessons of the school. Even more important perhaps now, there was the dominie’s library, and on its shelves, among a number of such classics, from Shakespeare to Dickens, as might be expected, some less ubiquitous volumes, of which a few were to pass into the texture of the student’s mind. There was Hazlitt, destined to be a life-long companion, Hazlitt whose Essays would lie open on a Prime Minister’s knee as he flew between Lossiemouth and London; there was Emerson, and more particularly Thoreau, who drew him both as democrat and nature-mystic; Carlyle, too, with his robust Teutonic Tory Socialism and his passionate demand for Leadership, and Ruskin’s semi-biblical Tory-Socialist aesthetics. There were some numbers of Joynes’ monthly *Christian Socialist*. And, a

little later, there was Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, which in the 'eighties made so many Radicals and Socialists. More than any other work, perhaps, this disposed him towards insurgent politics. In other ways, too, he was beginning to encounter political controversy. This was Scotland, these were the early 'eighties, and politics, for one thing, were in the air.

My childhood was lived at a time when the larger farmers were turning the people off the land, and when the good honest hatred the Scotsman has for landlords was being encouraged, and was taking firm root. . . . The whole of my part of Scotland was Radical, and we seemed to have been born with the democratic spirit strongly developed in us. In consequence, we looked down from the moment of our birth on the people we called 'swells,' and thought ourselves as good as, and a good deal better than, they were.

About the time that young MacDonald turned pupil-teacher, Mr. Gladstone was celebrating his political jubilee. He had been fifty years in public life, and there was a decade of it before him yet. It was but two years since the Midlothian campaign, and Scotland was still tingling with the excitement of that astonishing inauguration of democratic technique. One breathed Gladstonian Radicalism in the very air of Lossiemouth, and countless other Scottish villages. Men would walk miles each Saturday for their *People's Journal*, in which, in highly Scriptural language, "A Christian Democrat" exposed each week the beauty of holiness, the merits of Mr. Gladstone's Egyptian policy, or the godlike attributes of Mr. Gladstone. The young pupil-teacher warmly admired the Christian Democrat. He was an enthusiastic Gladstonian; what else indeed was there for him to be? Was not Toryism—not an issue of the *People's Journal* but made that abundantly clear—a clumsy and un-

principled conspiracy of the rich against the poor? And as for Socialism, since the early 'fifties and the forgotten Christian Socialists there had been no British Socialism. It would be reborn—for throughout their respective histories the Movement and the man were most opportunely matched by destiny—in 1884, the very year in which, at eighteen, MacDonald was to venture out into the wider world. But, for the moment, Liberalism and Gladstone filled the horizon. And a little later, the youthful teacher acted as Liberal sub-agent for a certain Mr. Keay at a victorious by-election in Moray and Nairn. He is even said to have been the prime mover in a scheme to confound the organisers of an important Conservative demonstration at Lossiemouth, which was to be addressed by a certain Mr. R. B. Finlay, said to be a doughty orator, by arranging that a fellow conspirator should be elected as an unexpected, and hostile, chairman of the meeting. The non-official chairman was not elected, but the attempt to elect him set going a chain of misadventures which culminated in Mr. Finlay's leaving hurriedly through a side door amidst considerable disorder, his speech still undelivered. The incident makes an unexpected introduction to the political career of one who was to be an almost fanatical stickler for order in debate.

It was a full ten years earlier that, in a famous speech, Disraeli had compared the Liberal Front Bench to a row of exhausted volcanoes. A far-reaching truth, for once, underlay the platform taunt. For in the great administration which ended in 1874, Gladstone had completed the task of placing the doctrines of Bentham and Mill upon the statute book—and the problem of poverty was still unsolved. It had almost begun to look as if new doctrines were required. But of all this the young pupil-teacher was as yet unaware.

Meanwhile his first public speech had been delivered—to a village Lecture and Debating Club with the charmingly characteristic title of Lossiemouth Mutual Improvement Association. "Has Literature done more for the world than Invention?"—such was the subject of debate, and MacDonald was for the Ayes. The speech is said to have been shy and hesitant, but so carefully prepared and so pointedly illustrated from the classics that it provoked a burst of cheering. It is possible that the speaker's subsequent history has somewhat magnified, in the memory of the survivors, the reception of that maiden speech. Conceivably it ended in a rumble of approval rather than an outburst of cheering. The fact remains that young MacDonald was henceforth a regular and admired protagonist in the weekly discussion as to whether Wellington was a greater man than Nelson, or the Cow a more Useful Animal than the Horse. In a few months he was elected secretary. The minute-book of the Mutual Improvement Association still exists. The signature, it is interesting to note, appears as "Jas. McDonald, Secy." The familiar "James Ramsay MacDonald" was only to arrive by degrees, the spelling of the surname being altered a few years later, and the Ramsay being added, a little later still, to avoid confusion with another James MacDonald, active in the Labour Movement about the turn of the century. There was the Lossiemouth Field Club too. This was founded by MacDonald himself, in March, 1883. Its earliest recruits came from the elder pupils at Drainie, but the membership spread to other boys, and eventually a small room in an empty house became the club premises, furnished with wooden forms and tables, a few books on geology and natural history and a cracked glass case, soon filled with shells, feathers, fragments of rock and other

"specimens" collected on the Saturday afternoon excursions. On the return from these rambles it was usually MacDonald, as curator, who would investigate, and hold forth upon, the day's finds, and at the mid-week meetings it was he who read the extracts from Geikie's *Geology*, which prefaced the paper from one of the elder members on stalactites, birds' nests, wild flowers or the cause of thunder. It was he, too, who conceived and carried out the project of publishing a Lossiemouth Field Club Magazine. A cyclostyle was purchased and, although there was a committee of nominal assistants, it was he who wrote the first number from cover to cover, and even designed a frontispiece. When the copies were run off, it was discovered that a natural error in placing the sheets on the "skin" had reversed their order. The frontispiece would appear at the end. With characteristic determination the curator-editor wrote the whole number out again. Not all that issue perished. Many years later, one yellow and dog's-eared specimen, from Australia, reached its former editor at 10 Downing Street.

The religious life of Lossiemouth, as of other Scotch villages, was intense. Besides the solemn Sunday services, there were the crowded week-night prayer-meetings; the annual "soirées," with tea, pastry and a secular entertainment, spiced with the favourite hymns, so appropriate in that village, "Fierce raged the tempest o'er the deep" and "Out on an Ocean all boundless we ride"; the marriages, christenings and funerals and, at longer intervals, the emotional Revivals and "salvation drives." There were visits from the Salvation Army too, at which it is related that MacDonald was apt to heckle the orators, and even to discharge peas with deadly aim, from between thumb and finger, at the occupants of the

penitent's form. There was also the constant under-current of theological controversy. Perhaps it was its gloomy strain of Calvinism which prevented organised religion from securing its hold upon MacDonald. There was that strain of rationalism in him too, conflicting and insistent. After listening one Sunday, when he was about twelve, at the Free Kirk Sunday School, to the story of Elijah and his translation to heaven in a chariot of fire, he is said to have inquired of the blacksmith Elder how the chariot could have risen, since its wheels had nothing but air to grip. The doctrine of the Trinity is known to have troubled him too. His feelings, as his Lossiemouth boyhood drew to an end, were probably already pretty much what they remained to his life's end. Essentially a profoundly religious man, with a mystic's unwavering reverence for "the grand, crowned authority of life," he was never a subscriber to sectarian creeds or, save in Lossiemouth, a regular frequenter of churches. He reverenced all Churches, as embodiments of the life of the spirit, and particularly the Presbyterian Church, because it was the Presbyterian Church which made Scotland what it is—the highest expression, he would have called it, of the Scottish national genius. But neither creeds nor ritual attracted him. His intellect turned elsewhere for sustenance, and as for his spirit, during these years of boyhood it fed not so much upon the austere weekly visits to kirk, as upon the wild woods and heaths of Moray, and the strange tales which haunted them. He never wholly shook off the faith of his childhood in second sight and the happenings for which reason knows no cause. It was after he had already twice kissed hands as Prime Minister that he would tell how a little London servant-girl had seemed to foresee her death by drowning at Lossiemouth, and how at the hour of her

passing a picture fell suddenly above the bed in her room at Hampstead.

For some months before his eighteenth birthday, he had been scanning the advertisement columns of *The Scotsman*. Secretly, he had been applying for situations all over the British Isles. Almost anything would serve, if it would take him south and open the prospect of repaying his womenfolk for their sacrifices, and even perhaps of an eventual university degree. The advertisers, however, seemed strangely indifferent to his offers. The weeks passed and there was no reply. At last there came an inquiry from a Bristol clergyman. The Reverend Mordaunt Crofton, of St. Stephen's Church, was inaugurating a Boys' and Young Men's Guild in Queen's Square. Would Mr. James MacDonald be good enough to send an account of his qualifications, not forgetting to particularise his religious and political convictions and the salary he would expect? Mr. James MacDonald replied eagerly and at length on all these matters, save the salary, which he preferred to leave to Mr. Crofton's discretion. A further exchange of letters, testimonials from the Dominie and the Minister, and he was engaged. The portals of the mysterious and alluring south were opening. Beyond them he felt sure that he could descry the Promised Land. Isabella and Anne were not perhaps so certain. But they had unlimited confidence in Jamie, and for Jamie's sake they stifled their doubts. The dominie gave his blessing to the project. He quoted a wise saw from Carlyle and, with considerable prescience, adjured his young friend above all things to be careful of his health.

One morning in the summer of 1885 the boy embarked, from Lossiemouth railway station, on his great adventure. Isabella and Anne were on the platform.

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Since then that remote little station has witnessed a number of unusual sights—civic welcomes, the arrival of foreign ambassadors, a ranked, silent populace awaiting the coffin of an ex-Prime Minister; but none perhaps in its own way more remarkable than this inconspicuous departure. The train drew out, past the familiar but-and-ben in which the boy had been born and reared. He leaned from the carriage window for a last glimpse of the familiar figures on the platform. In the rack behind him was his luggage, a small, second-hand suitcase and a bundle of books tied together with string. In his pocket was a purse, containing a single railway ticket, a pound note and seven shillings in silver.

FALSE START

1885

By an accident, as it is commonly called, both of place and time, not only did the city to which MacDonald had been summoned by the advertisement columns of *The Scotsman* possess what was, outside London, almost the only organised Socialist group in the kingdom, but the moment of his southward adventure exactly coincided with the inconspicuous re-birth of British Socialism. More than a generation ago, the little group of Christian Socialists had dispersed, and since then there had been, for practical purposes, no Socialists in England. Of Socialism however, and this was what would matter, there had been a good deal—or perhaps, for the year 1885, Collectivism would be a more scientific label. For Collectivism is to Socialism what Individualism was to Whig Liberalism—a political philosophy not yet become an instrument of Party warfare, or the creed, as Whig-Liberalism had once been, of the rise of a class to political power. The Combination Act of 1875, the Trade Union legislation of the same year, the Arbitration Acts, beginning in 1867, the Education Act of 1870, the Sanitary Code of 1875, the growth of municipal trading, developments such as these, clearly founded upon the principles, unconscious though they may have been, of collective action and state interference, were Collectivism. This legislation had been enacted by Liberals and Conservatives; for Englishmen have only tolerated

Socialist legislation if it is not called Socialism and is imposed on them by anti-Socialists. None the less, by 1885 Collectivism was in the air, as all-pervasive perhaps in the intellectual atmosphere of the day as had been Individualism in the eighteen-thirties. Socialism, when it arrived, would be but the demand for a more rapid, a more thorough, a more class-directed Collectivism than was already taking shape at the hands of the Liberal and Conservative Parties. Collectivism had been already for a decade—since Disraeli succeeded the “range of exhausted volcanoes” in 1874, in fact—in the ascendant. As for Socialism, it was only now struggling inconspicuously into life. On June 8th, 1881, H. M. Hyndman, a frock-coated old Etonian, had founded the Democratic Federation, and, though it was not till 1884 that it had proclaimed itself the Social Democratic Federation, it claimed to have been “from the first . . . a definite Socialist body.” Nor was it only Socialist; thanks to Hyndman, one of the few Englishmen who has ever read *Capital* from beginning to end, it had embraced in its entirety the rigid system of Marx. Commanding though the dialectical powers of that elderly foreigner might be, few persons of intellectual distinction have succeeded in misunderstanding England more completely than he. It would be for time to expose the sweeping misjudgments on which his economic prophecies were founded; but from the first the very temper of the Marxian doctrine doomed it to permanent sterility on British soil. Theoretic, rigidly atheist, bitterly class-conscious, eagerly welcoming misery and violence as its prospective instruments, it was a gospel rooted in hatred—“We must hate them,” wrote an early convert; “bitterness should be as gall and wormwood to the soul.” British wage-earners, kindly, religious and constitutionally suspicious

of all Systems, found it extremely difficult to hate, and were in the last degree unlikely to take readily to such a creed. However, Hyndman, and, thanks to Hyndman, Marx, had been first in the field. Though the Fabian Society was founded in 1884—and it would have been difficult indeed to be more unlike Hyndman and his Federation than were the Fabians—a would-be Socialist in the early 'eighties had virtually no choice. And in February of 1884 a branch of the Democratic Federation had actually been formed at Bristol. It was an isolated, as well as a diminutive, affair—there seem even in 1885 to have been only eight branches of the Federation outside London and its suburbs, and Bristol was the only one of them south of the Trent.

The advertisement columns of *The Scotsman* had thus brought MacDonald, against all the chances, to a city in which there was some germ of Socialist activity, but it was a brand of Socialism which he was to spend most of his political maturity in denouncing. The politics of the Democratic Federation, like Mr. Mordaunt Crofton's employment, were to prove a *cul-de-sac*. Nevertheless it was something that at eighteen and a half he should already have familiarised himself with the label, Socialism, and with the friendly working-class politicians.

It was not long after the young man Bristol that he heard of the existence of a group. Vivid memories flooded back, of disc the dominie at Drainie, of Henry George monthly *Christian Socialist*. Clearly he must But where was this mysterious and exciting be found? Neither the Reverend Mordaunt the members of the Boys' and Young Men's enlighten him. Nor, it soon began to a

anybody else. Bristol Socialism might almost have been a secret society. In despair, he applied to the police. The obliging minions of Capitalism directed him to 58 West Street, where a British Workman's Coffee-Tavern was kept by a Mr. Thomas Elworthy. Not without an effort, for he was painfully shy, he presented himself at this inconspicuous *rendezvous*. The little group of working-men greeted him warmly. The handsome young Scot, with his bright eyes, his rolling r's and his exuberant vitality, was not only an unexpected visitor but a potential recruit. They were not disappointed; the visitor decided at once to join. Many years later he described the initiation.

There was something exotic about it. The odour of sawdust and steaming coffee, the long wooden staircase, the dimly-lit small upper room with the hard penitential forms, impressed the novice with a sense of awe and expectation. That coffee shop was a cathedral, and its odours were the smells of sacrifice which were being offered up by Demos. A paper on 'Ruskin,' to a small audience, was read—and thus I became a full-blown Social Democrat.

Ruskin was an appropriate accompaniment to that initiation. In years to come the dryer sort of politician would frequently complain that at heart MacDonald was an æsthetæ.

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The novice experienced at once the convert's familiar sense of vocation, all the more exhilarating perhaps for the smallness of the *ecclesia* to which he had adhered. The coffee-house group became the centre of his Bristol life. It was the Lossiemouth Mutual Improvement Association over again, spiced with a novel sense of evangelism. He moved his lodgings from Queen's

Square to Franklyn Street, St. Paul's, opposite the home of one of his fellow-members. This new friend and his wife took a parental interest in the young enthusiast, whose vitality and high spirits attracted them. He would frequently drop in for a game of cards or a chat. He wrote regularly, they observed with approval, to his distant home, and every now and again a parcel of home-made cakes or butter would arrive from Lossiemouth. Such supplies were invaluable, for he had already contracted a dangerous habit of underfeeding himself. The Sharlands, leaders of the Bristol group, used from time to time compel him to come home to substantial meals with them. Left to himself, he preferred books to either food or watertight boots. Plutarch's *Lives* is said to have been just now his most constant companion. But he flung himself with energy into the still tentative activities of the Branch. About this time Edward Carpenter presented it with five pounds, and it was decided to spend the money on books. Inevitably MacDonald became librarian. He selected and, of course, read, the books, and is said to have left the miniature library, and its arrangements, a model of precision. More important, that summer the Branch took to street-corner propaganda. The desirability of open-air meetings had long been acknowledged, but the members were very conscious of their own limitations. The months slipped by, and somehow the outdoor meetings, admitted by all to be so desirable, did not take place. Then, in June, a London member visited the Branch and urged it to take the plunge, describing—it must have been with considerable poetic licence—the wonderful results of street-corner propaganda in London. The members applauded warmly, but continued to hesitate. Then, unexpectedly, another London member, one J. Hunter Watts, looked

in on the Branch and startled it by asking breezily, "What about that meeting?" He was prepared, it appeared, to initiate them forthwith. Stoutly concealing their tremors, the handful of members followed him to an open space opposite St. Jude's Church. With mingled admiration and astonishment they observed the non-chalance with which Mr. Watts, instructing them to form a circle about him on the cobble-stones, proceeded at once, without stool, chair or soapbox, to repeat in a gradual crescendo: "Friends, we are the Bristol Branch of the Social Democratic Federation, and we are going to hold a meeting. We shall tell you of our message to the workers of the world, what it means to you, and how it will relieve you of your poverty." A few passers-by stopped to stare indifferently for a minute or two, but the meeting ended—Mr. Watts was the only speaker—as it had begun, amid the complete indifference of the public of Bristol. A dog-fight, a drunken navvy would have attracted more attention. However, they had broken the ice. Next week, and, later on, at regular intervals, the Branch members did their best to follow Mr. Watts' example. At the Ropewalk, in Goodhind Street, at Bath Bridge and Bristol Bridge and on the Batch they too proclaimed to an apparently indifferent world that they were the Bristol Branch of the Social Democratic Federation, about to deliver their message to mankind. A small red silk flag had been emblazoned with the name of the Branch, and at meetings members would circulate amid the scanty knot of onlookers, offering copies of *Justice*, the Federation's weekly organ, for sale. Such was the future Prime Minister's introduction to the years of arduous propaganda which lay ahead of him. And though, politically, the Social Democratic Federation was a blind alley—indeed in December of this very



At 16 years of age.



Photographs by B. Wilken, Elgin.

"... all the i month and - MacDonald was brought

year the Bristol Branch seceded, as had William Morris and a majority of its central executive twelve months earlier—its scanty membership was more English than its doctrines, and in it MacDonald first encountered the contagious and uplifting evangelical zeal of the pioneer. “We had all the enthusiasm of early Christians in those days,” he wrote later. “We were few and the Gospel was new.” It was not long, needless to say, before he was himself taking a hand in the outdoor speaking. A persistent tradition asserts that for his first effort there was an audience of three. The total of those who have since claimed to have been present must be many times as numerous, but all, curiously enough, seem to be agreed that only three were there.

In other ways, too, the young immigrant was serving a first rude apprenticeship to politics. There are records of his share in a discussion, first of how many, as to ways and means of raising the circulation of the official organ of his friends’ views. He desired that it should “rise higher and higher in tone.” The bitterness and the militant anti-religious tone of *Justice* were certainly alien to the traditions both of the *People’s Journal* and of the Lossiemouth Free Kirk. At a Branch meeting in the early autumn—it was at the time of the Dod Street “free speech riots” in London—he moved a condemnation of “the arbitrary action of the London Police and Authorities in their recent attempts to suppress open-air meetings,” and, in the traditional phraseology of such resolutions, “viewed with alarm the efforts to suppress free speech and public meetings.” On October the first, he was even delivering a lecture in the coffee-tavern on “Malthusianism *versus* Socialism.”

“In a lucid and interesting manner,” recorded the secretary

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afterwards, "the lecturer compared the two doctrines, and pointed to the powerlessness of Malthusianism to remove the evils by which we are surrounded, while by the adoption of Socialist principles the misery could be stamped out."

It was characteristic of MacDonald that the subject of that first address to his fellow-members should not have been politics undiluted. He could not yet suppose that his life was to be spent on politics, and the spell of his first love, science, was still strong; he had forgotten neither Hugh Miller and the Thurso Baker, nor how the dominie had once said of exact knowledge that the pupils who mastered but one department of it "would master life and the world." Malthusianism was hardly a living issue in 1885, but it pleased him, no doubt, to hang his discourse upon the peg of a controversy which had once occupied the borderland between politics and science.

The Branch and Mr. Mordaunt Crofton's Guild, between them, filled most of the young man's time. But not all. There were hours of relaxation, when he was free to pursue his taste for science. He had become an enthusiastic geologist. Not only was geology a science, and as such a possible avenue to a scholarship, and eventually, who could tell, to the academic profession; it satisfied another of his life-long tastes, the love of walking. There were expeditions, all on foot, to every point of the compass in the neighbourhood of Bristol, expeditions as far afield as Tortworth and Wootton-under-Edge, expeditions shared, like those of the Lossiemouth Field Club, by companions temporarily infected by his enthusiasm, and readier perhaps to learn from it than to attack the text-books for themselves. Haversacks bulky with specimens were brought home, and gradually a treatise on the geology of the district was compiled.

This manuscript, "Geology of Bristol, with Sections," is still in existence. In MacDonald's already exquisitely neat and highly individual calligraphy, under such headings as *Physical Description*, *Stratigraphical Geology*, *Silurian*, *Devonian*, *Carboniferous*, it describes, in highly technical language, the strata of the neighbourhood.

At Bradford-on-Avon is the Bradford Clay, containing *apiocrinus Parkinsoni*. At the same place is the Bath Oolite with *Derebratula coartata* and *digona*.

Inside the front cover of the tiny volume are the neatest drawings of Sections, at three neighbouring villages, and on a miniature folding plan at the back is a diagram of strata running from the Suspension Bridge, south-east of Bristol, to Cook's Folly, on the north-west. In all, the formation of fifty-seven different localities is briefly described. The author of this manuscript took his hobby seriously and was clearly an advanced amateur geologist. It has often been said, indeed MacDonald often said himself, that he might have been an imaginative writer, if he had not been a politician. But there was always the twofold vein in his make-up, and there seems little doubt that, in altered circumstances, he might equally well have become a Professor of Science.

Employment with the Reverend Mordaunt Crofton did not last long. For some reason or other, whether or not connected with his own membership of the Democratic Federation, MacDonald did not see eye to eye with him. Before the end of the year, it became obvious that he would have to return to Lossiemouth. The decision, though inevitable, was a blow to his pride. The most promising lad in Lossiemouth had failed in his first venture, and soon all Lossiemouth would know it. He resolved, there and then, that from his second venture,

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come what may, he would either return successful or would not return at all. Bristol had proved a *cul-de-sac*. He had made a false start. Political prospects, if he had remained permanently of the Democratic Federation, were no brighter than personal prospects in Mr. Crofton's Guild. Nevertheless, he had learned to stand upon his own feet. He had known the uplifting thrill of political pioneering. And, be it noted, he had professed himself a Socialist before any other politician of his generation

III

FIRST RUNGS

1886-1896

A FEW pounds had somehow been saved in Bristol—at his time MacDonald possessed heroic powers of economy. He did not return altogether empty-handed. Nevertheless, though, in their pleasure at having him with them again, it was easy to conceal it, Isabella and Anne were no doubt just a trifle surprised and just a trifle disappointed that the boy had not taken England by storm. He did not stay in Lossiemouth long. There was a visit or two to the dominie, a few more excursions over the well-loved shores and heaths, the kindly, but faintly embarrassing, inquisitiveness of old friends, and the foundation of a Lossiemouth Branch, not destined for longevity, of the Social Democratic Federation. And from this brief return to Lossiemouth dates another characteristic early profession of political faith. A letter, signed James MacDonald, and written from Lossiemouth in February of 1886, appeared in the *Christian Socialist* of that month.

Thoughtful young men in all parts of the country are beginning to see that the end of the present state of things is near . . . their hearts go forth to the misery of the poor. Never yet knowing what it is to wrong their brothers, they love and sympathise with them all. Still being upright, they feel as if throughout their lives they would dare to stand aloof from injustice. Not yet demoralised by wealth, or effeminate with ease, they possess unsullied the chivalry of

Britons. Now I have thought: Why cannot these men be united? Why cannot their sympathies, so easily blunted, be deepened by being based on principles? Cannot these humane feelings be the foundations of ideas?

And the writer concludes:

I make bold to suggest that a Socialist Union of Young Men be formed.

This, it will be noticed, was seven years before the foundation of the Independent Labour Party, and six years before Keir Hardie was returned, with Liberal support, but as an avowed Socialist, for West Ham. Three months later, the *Christian Socialist* printed an attack on a certain Mr. Smart of Edinburgh, who had apparently been delivering himself of anti-Socialist views. The article, signed J. R. MacDonald and headed *The Professors and Socialism*, may or may not have been written during this brief withdrawal from the south. But it is evident that there is nothing to be said for the once familiar tradition which assigned MacDonald's acceptance of the new creed to the year 1895, in which he first adhered to the Independent Labour Party.

A month or two, and he had slipped inconspicuously away to the south again. A friend in London had written of a post which he felt sure MacDonald could fill. This time it was to be do or die. It was nearly, very nearly, die. The prospective post was filled on the very day before he reached London. He took cheap lodgings in Kentish Town and began to look for another. But he had not realised how formidable that search would be. By day he tramped from office to office, from shop to shop, from factory to factory. At night he replied to advertisements. He was not looking for any particular kind of work; he was looking for work—

for anything which would keep him alive. And meanwhile the days, and the shillings, slipped away. He lived on next to nothing—on oatmeal sent from home, and scrupulously paid for, on an occasional threepenny beefsteak pudding, with more pudding in it than beef-steak—"but it helped to fill up the corners"—and on hot water, which tasted, he decided, as well as coffee when one had grown used to it. But even so the shillings melted. He cut down the two meals a day, if meals be the word for them, to one. But still no employer, however small, considered the abilities of the future Prime Minister adequate for his requirements, however petty. And then, one day, there was only a shilling left. There were by now one or two people in London whom the young man knew, but to them nothing would have persuaded him to apply. When the last shilling had gone, he could always set out for Lossiemouth. Somehow or other he would probably reach it. Or, just conceivably, he would not. In any case, if it was to be retreat this time, the gates of the south, it must be presumed, would be closed for ever. It is said that it was on the afternoon of the last day on which it was possible to keep the struggle going that he found employment. It was the addressing of envelopes, at ten shillings a week, for the newly formed Cyclist Touring Club. And so, though he had been within a few hours of failure, he had survived. He had not been driven back from the gates of opportunity. Ten shillings a week and the envelopes of the Cyclists' Touring Club had ensured him a political career.

Not that the Cyclists afforded an economic anchorage for long. It was temporary work, and there was another trying hiatus before he was taken on, this time at fifteen shillings a week, as invoice-clerk in a warehouse. Fifteen

shillings a week was prosperity. He claimed afterwards that on fifteen shillings he had "lived like a fighting-cock," taken a holiday in Scotland, helped his mother, paid fees at the Birkbeck Institute, the City of London College and the Highbury Institute, and saved money into the bargain. It sounds impossible, yet no doubt he managed it. Indeed he has described his methods.

How did I manage to do it? In the first place I used to buy myself whatever food I wanted around the slums of King's Cross, but I used to receive my staple food, oatmeal, sent to me from home, and I always paid for it. Of course, I could not afford tea or coffee, but I found hot water quite as good as tea from the point of view of food, and that it tastes quite as well when once you have grown used to it. In the middle of the day I had a meal at Pearce and Plenty's, in Aldersgate Street. I don't think I ever spent more than twopence or threepence on it, although it was the meal of the day. It generally consisted of beefsteak pudding. I don't know that there was very much beefsteak in it, but it filled up a corner and certainly did me no harm. My food bill worked out at about sevenpence or eightpence a day for everything, so that saving was easy.

As a sequel to the heart-testing search for work, this spell of making ends so much more than meet on so little was certainly a graduation in the harsh realities which underlie politics. There have been Labour Members who have rarely made a speech in Parliament without re-embroidering the theme of their youthful hardships. MacDonald was not of that sort. He scarcely ever spoke of his early struggles. But there can be no doubt that these experiences coloured his political outlook. Sympathy for poverty he did not need to learn; he had long known poverty at close quarters in Lossiemouth, and we have already seen him describe sympathy for "the misery of the poor" as the mainspring of the

politics for which he was groping. The ever remembered lesson which life was now teaching him was the virtues of self-reliance. Of boyhood at Lossiemouth he wrote later:

The young generation inherit nothing but honesty and independence and are brought up in a scantiness which nourishes the aristocratic virtues of their character.

That notion of the relationship between poverty and aristocracy is characteristic of MacDonald. And this was the very lesson which London was now reinforcing. And though he seldom spoke afterwards of his early hardships, he was always suspicious of any legislation which seemed to threaten the self-reliance of the poor. Sturdy Collectivist though he was, his boyhood and his youth had made it impossible for him to forget the moral truths which, despite its blindness and its exaggerations, underlay the old Individualism. Against the blindness and exaggerations to which Collectivism too is susceptible he was forewarned from the beginning.

In the warehouse the young man did his best. It was not exciting work. He had to learn to draw an invoice; and then it was endless additions and subtractions, beside a deskfellow who took snuff, while the lorries rumbled through the narrow streets outside and in the warehouse men in aprons bent over packing cases or hurried up and down stairs with slips of paper in their hands, and Mr. John tripped along with his short, quick paces, in his long black coat, with a red ledger under his arm. It was not exciting, but it was work, and as such to be done with a will. And there were always the lunch hours. Usually, instead of wasting money on food, he would explore the neighbourhood and mingle with the tides of humanity surging down the narrow streets

of the City. And then one day he discovered the Guildhall Library. There were books and newspapers to be read for nothing, a banquet indeed for the boy who not so long ago had been walking five miles each way to regale himself on the contents of such pages as might chance to lie open in the windows of the Elgin booksellers. After this for a long while, every lunch hour was spent in its cool recesses. The warehouse was a mere means to an end—he was still hoping to win a scholarship of some sort—but he must have made a favourable impression on Mr. John, Mr. Wildman and Mr. Creswell and the tophatted confidential clerk who read the *Daily Telegraph* in his morning train, for he was soon promoted to the counting-house and a pound a week. Indeed his employers made a prophetic entry in their books to the effect that he would “yet rise to distinction.” And, as he learned long afterwards, he had already been marked down for further promotion when he parted from the warehouse and the world of commerce for ever. He had encountered an analytical chemist, who had been struck by his pleasing manners and obvious intelligence, and had given him the run of his laboratory in the evenings. Here MacDonald carried out a series of experiments, principally in coal analysis, on the strength of which this new friend invited him to leave the counting-house and become his assistant. This was a long stride towards his goal—a science scholarship at the South Kensington Museum. Unfortunately he now committed an error which he was constantly to repeat in later life—he overworked. As he afterwards confessed, “I stayed at home, working, morning, afternoon and night. I never went out.” He is said indeed often to have worked twenty hours a day. On the top of prolonged and deliberate under-feeding this was more than even his tough constitution

could stand. His health broke down completely. It seemed at the time a crushing misfortune. He had already passed some preliminary examinations in science. In a few weeks he was to sit for his scholarship. All had to be abandoned; once more he must fall back upon his base. For several months he was nursed back to health by Isabella and Anne.¹

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But this misfortune was perhaps after all not so much a misfortune as a blessing in disguise. It ensured that MacDonald would become a politician and not a scientist. When he returned to brave London once more, it was to another heart-breaking search for employment and another spell of makeshift temporary jobs. But when something like opportunity dawned again, it proved to be political opportunity. In 1888 he became private secretary to a Mr. Thomas Lough, Gladstonian Liberal candidate for West Islington. At the moment, perhaps, its meagre salary, £75, rising to £100, seemed the most important aspect of the post—"now I have attained to fortune" he wrote at the time. But in the long run what mattered more was that Mr. Lough and Mr. Lough's affairs introduced him to new aspects both of politics and of society. Hitherto politics had meant a handful of working men in the small upper room of an obscure coffee-tavern, hard benches and a sawdust floor, or small knots of the suspicious and apathetic pausing to listen to a street corner harangue. With Mr. Lough he glimpsed for the first time a different stratum of politics; the organisation of a constituency, the possibilities of propaganda when there is money to be spent on it, the study of economic facts as well as the voicing of economic aspirations. Moreover there were Mr. Lough's friends,

¹ Isabella Ramsay, MacDonald's grandmother, died in 1893.

prosperous, politically-minded members of the middle-class. This was not so much another aspect of politics as another aspect of life. MacDonald found it easy to adapt himself to the social habits of a more prosperous and cultivated class. Indeed there was a well-marked aristocratic vein in his character, the inward counterpart of the sensitive dignity of his countenance and bearing; and in later life he would feel more at home with the squire than with the merchant. He loved beauty, he admired dignity and courage, the aristocratic virtues; with vulgarity, meanness and cowardice he never had much patience. This temper did not imply, as, throughout his career, with varying emphasis, his detractors constantly asserted that it did, any breach of sympathy with the masses. His own phrase, quoted a page or two earlier, about poverty nourishing the aristocratic virtues, was not only highly characteristic of MacDonald, it enshrines a profound truth. The poor have far more in common with the genuine aristocrat than with the commercial middle-class. Like him, they are free from the pressure of the narrower social conventions, and can be more human because they are more natural. MacDonald was never to lose touch with the people. His returns, usually several times a year, all through his life, to Lossiemouth represented a search for spiritual, as well as physical, refreshment; and this he found not only on the shores and heaths, but among the humble fisherfolk of the place—"the poorest of them," he wrote, "receive you with a dignity of gentlemen, look you in the face and bid you welcome to their harbours as though they were receiving you in a drawing-room. Their natures are not twisted and contorted by the superficial arts of an artificial society." When, in due course, the occasion demanded, he would figure as naturally in the

duke's saloon as in the fisherman's but-and-ben. But that did not mean, as some of his enemies said it meant, that he had betrayed the fishermen to the dukes. All that it did mean was that he never suffered from those ranking complexes, which compel some persons to behave with arrogant and envious hostility towards the successful and the fortunate. The psychological stresses of his fatherless Lossiemouth childhood may have made him over-sensitive, but they never saddled him with the sense of inferiority from which that inverted snobbery springs. His liking fishermen did not prevent him from liking dukes. Mr. Lough played an important part in MacDonald's career. The startling evolution, in a mere year or two, of the starving young Scottish peasant into the arresting young politician who argued with the Fabians in their prosperous drawing-rooms, and lunched with successful journalists in Fleet Street—all this Mr. Lough had made possible. But neither the accident of the secretaryship to Mr. Lough, nor, for that matter, anything else, could have made it possible, if MacDonald's character had been rooted in resentment. But it was not bitterness, bred of youthful hardships, which made MacDonald a Socialist. It was first and foremost his scientific bias.

Secretaryships were important stepping-stones in MacDonald's early career. For that vein in his make-up which so sharply offset the mystic and the emotional had equipped him as a first-class organiser. Already there had been the Lossiemouth Mutual Improvement Association and the Lossiemouth Field Club. Now, in a wider field, and enriched by his experience with Mr. Lough, he was to handle a succession of more important levers. In the same year, 1888, in which he began his four years' work for Mr. Lough, he was Secretary—Honorary

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Secretary—of the Scottish Home Rule Association. In that year Keir Hardie was making his first appearance in the Parliamentary arena, at a by-election in Mid-Lanark. This was a “Labour,” but not a Socialist, candidature. Hardie, that is, had presented himself as a Liberal, but a Liberal who, unlike the rest of the seventy-two Scottish Members, was a “working-man.” To the Scottish Home Rule Association, however, the venture appealed primarily because Hardie was a Scot, and the new Secretary dispatched the following letter.¹ It was the first communication between two men for whom destiny held close and prolonged association in store.

To J. Keir Hardie.

23 Kelly Street,
Kentish Town, London.

DEAR MR. HARDIE,

I cannot refrain from wishing you God-speed in your election contest. Had I been able to have gone to Mid-Lanark to help you—to do so would have given very great pleasure indeed; the powers of darkness—Scottish newspapers with English editors (as the *Leader*), partisan wire-pullers, and the other etceteras of political squabbles—are leagued against us.

But let the consequences be what they may, do not withdraw. The cause of Labour and of Scottish Nationality will suffer much thereby. Your defeat will awaken Scotland, and your victory will reconstruct Scottish Liberalism. All success be yours, and the National cause you champion. There is no finer—and no other one for that matter—who is a Scotsman and not ashamed of it, who will vote against you in favour of an obscure English barrister, absolutely ignorant of Scotland and of Scottish affairs, and who only wants to get to Parliament in order that he may have the tail of M.P. to his name in the law courts.

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

¹ Printed in W. Stewart's *Life of Keir Hardie*.

Scottish Home Rule was not a cause which commended itself to MacDonald for long. In his last electoral contest, indeed, a Scottish Home Ruler was among his opponents.

A few years later, in 1892-3, came another unpaid Secretaryship—of a certain Fellowship of the New Life, whose ambitious, if somewhat nebulous, aim was “the reconstruction of Society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities.” This was precisely the sort of organisation, in which worthy but unpractical idealists share, and admire, each others’ emotions, which MacDonald soon learnt to distrust. It had made a transitory appeal to his youth, and to that which was emotional and uncritical in him, perhaps even to that mystical element in his nature which always needed sustenance—about this time he toyed with the doctrines of Swedenborg. But the only surviving importance of the Fellowship of the New Life is that, by a curious combination of circumstances, it had in 1884 given birth to the severely practical Fabian Society. MacDonald joined the Fabians as early as 1886. There were more Socialist and Labour organisations in London than there had been in Bristol. With catholic enthusiasm he joined them all. For though Mr. Lough was a Liberal, this did not prevent his Secretary from proceeding with his Socialist education. Thanks to his Bristol initiation, he had soon established contact with the Social Democrats of London. Already, in March of 1886, he had listened to John Burns delivering a Socialist speech from the dock, after the once alarming, but now faintly ridiculous, Trafalgar Square riots. A few days after that, he spoke for the Federation himself in Regent’s Park. “That meeting was the first one at which I ever spoke,” he said in later life, forgetting presumably the earlier Bristol occasion, sufficiently well substantiated by tradition.

This may however have been his first political audience to be numbered in double figures. The speech was at least sufficiently successful for him to be invited to perform again on the following Sunday. And after this he began to speak regularly for the Federation.

That began my work for the Socialist movement in London. It was a queer, insignificant movement, then, doing most of its work in the open air or in pokey little halls.

In one of these latter, it is recorded, his face so struck an artist who chanced to be present that he promptly made a sketch of it, and used it as an illustration of the hero of William Black's *Prince Charming*. In 1887 he was present in Trafalgar Square on the notorious "Bloody Sunday" of November 13th. The police had prohibited a meeting in Trafalgar Square, and a vast crowd collected, determined that it should be held. There was a battalion of Foot Guards with ball cartridge and fixed bayonets, there were charges by mounted police, and men and women "rolled over like ninepins," "falling under a hail of blows." John Burns and Cunningham Graham penetrated the cordon, and were arrested. William Morris was in one of the converging columns, and was swept away, swearing violently, in the rout after a police charge. The future Prime Minister had gone there "to preserve the right of public meeting."

His early experiences of the Social Democratic Federation taught him the futility, in Britain at any rate, of what Shaw called "revolutionary heroics"—the eternal dilemma of the speakers who assured their audiences that violence was the only hope of redress, and then invited them to disperse quietly—as well as the persistent indifference of British audiences to both economic shibboleths and appeals to class hatred. From



Ann Ramsay, Ramsay MacDonald's mother.

Hyndman's leadership of the parent body he learned much too of how not to manage men. But there were other and less negative lessons to come. He had joined the London Trades Council—of which the Secretary was that other James MacDonald, whose presence in the Labour movement impelled him to add the now familiar Ramsay to his previous signature. Above all, he joined the Fabians. A middle-class body meeting in each others' comfortable drawing-rooms, and named after that Fabius the Delayer, who had waited for his "moment," the Fabians were as characteristically English in their tactics and their outlook as the Federation had been defiantly alien. Their object was "the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership." No "revolutionary heroics" however for them. For a year or two, they were "as insurrectionary as the Federation." But it was not long before other counsels prevailed. Conscious of the profound political tendencies of their day, aware that, in Shaw's words, "almost all organisations and movements contain elements making for Socialism," they decided that their task was to harness, and not, like the Federation, to ignore, the tremendous latent forces of their age; to permeate other parties, not to found their own; to add their own discreet impulse to the forces already ubiquitously making for Collectivism, rather than to antagonise, and so perhaps to retard, those who must inevitably serve as its agents. To their already sufficiently suspect creed, moreover, they would add no irrelevant and distracting shibboleths; Fabianism was to hold "no distinctive opinions on the Marriage Question, Religion, Abstract Economics, Historic Evolution, Currency, or any other subject than its own special business of practical Democracy and Socialism." There was, in brief, to be no

Ideology. Inevitably, too, Fabianism was to be constitutional: it sympathised "with the ordinary citizen's desire for gradual, peaceful changes, as against revolution, conflict with the army and police, and martyrdom." It foresaw, in short, in the next forty years what it had the discernment to detect in the past forty years—the progressive Socialisation of Britain by anti-Socialists. Its own special contribution to this process, it decided, should be the generation of light, rather than heat. A steady stream of pamphlets, largely at first from the prolific pen of Sidney Webb, commenced forthwith.

Inevitably Fabianism meant much more in the development of MacDonald's political ideas than could the doctrines or the tactics of the Social Democratic Federation. Its whole outlook matched his temperament. Not only was it planning to harness—and not to obstruct—the latent forces of its age. It believed, as all his scientific training bade MacDonald believe, in organic *growth*. When MacDonald wrote that Socialism meant the growth of Society, not the uprising of a class, he meant precisely what Webb meant when he spoke, less gracefully, of the inevitability of gradualness. Moreover the Fabian respect for facts, the Fabian practice of research, attracted him; thanks to them, politics seemed a less abrupt deviation from his early scientific ambitions. He began to meet the Fabians—Webb, Wallas, Olivier, Shaw and others. And, for a while, he shared an interesting menage with a handful of disciples of the New Life Fellowship. An empty house in Doughty Street was rented, the several rooms were allotted as bed sitting-rooms, and meals were shared in the basement. Other members of this enterprisingly co-operative household were Sydney Olivier, then and until 1890 Secretary of the Fabian Society, who afterwards became Lord Olivier

and Secretary for India in the first Labour Government; Miss Edith Lees, who was for some years honorary Secretary of the Fellowship of the New Life, and who married Havelock Ellis, another member; Miss Emma Brooke, also a Fabian, and later a Suffragist; Miss Alice Henry, who professed herself an anarchist, and an elderly Russian lady, named Pagovsky, and her daughter, also a member of the New Life Fellowship. This Doughty Street menage seems to have been in part a practical attempt at cheap collective house-keeping, and in part a miniature experiment in a New Life Community. To his fellow members in that variegated menage MacDonald appeared as a picturesque, earnest and slightly mysterious young idealist, who did not entirely approve of Bernard Shaw's jokes and was doing some writing for Scottish newspapers and investigating the cult of Swedenborg, from whose writings he would copy long extracts. Dr. Stanton Coit, who knew him well in the 'nineties, remembers his striking appearance—"he had the most magnificent eye I ever saw."

From 1894 to 1900 MacDonald was a member of the Fabian executive, and for a year or two from 1895 he lectured for the Society—a Hutchinson Trust had provided some funds to pay speakers—in various parts of the country.

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In 1894, the year in which he reached the Executive of the Fabian Society, came another and an even more significant adhesion. For strange new forces were stirring in the world of Labour, forces as native to the soil as Fabianism and far more explosive, forces to which in due course MacDonald would owe his rise to power. It is possible now to explain in a few sentences the genesis and the significance of a movement which to contem-

poraries appeared as mysterious as it was alarming. For practical purposes, until 1889 (for the Fabians did not begin to acquire a public till that year) there had existed in Britain no more than two struggling, and indeed almost esoteric, Socialist organisations—the Social Democratic Federation and a secession from it, William Morris's Socialist League, which was to expire in 1890. Until 1889, consequently, the mass of wage-earners had remained not so much indifferent to Socialist doctrine as ignorant of its very existence. And what is more, the wage-earners at this time were sharply divided into two scarcely related worlds. Above, were the organised trade unions, comfortable, acquiescent and exclusive, a veritable aristocracy of Labour. Below, far below, at depths scarcely measurable even by the cavernous social gulf which yawned between a bricklayer and a bricklayer's labourer, were the unorganised, unskilled and underpaid masses. In many public houses special rooms must be set apart, lest the trade unionists should encounter their social inferiors. In a few weeks of 1889 the great dock strike changed all this. It bridged the gulf between the two grades of wage-earner, and into the now uniting world of Labour it discharged forces which would diffuse the Socialist doctrine—but in a new form. For the victorious and highly disciplined dock strike taught the unorganised that they were not, as had been universally supposed, unorganisable. And the men who had lead them were Socialists. Soon, with the prestige of victory behind them, these men were beginning to assert their influence in the Trades Union Congress. Rapidly, unskilled labour was organised. And in 1893 they founded the Independent Labour Party. Its professed object was "to secure the collective ownership of all the means of production, distribution

and exchange." But with characteristic prudence, as soon as a decisive vote had determined that its object should be Socialism, it selected, by an equally decisive vote, a title which suggested that its aim was merely the separate representation of Labour. From the first, it preached not only independent Labour representation but Socialism. But it was a new brand of Socialism, adapted both to the practical nature of the English and to their complete indifference to logic. Hitherto such Socialism as there had been had appeared to offer at best a remote and almost unimaginable Utopia, as to whose particulars even Socialists were seldom in agreement, and which was to be achieved, at some unspecified and presumably distant date, by some act, or process, of violence, which no Socialist had attempted to describe. The new men, with their increasing access to the unions, would concentrate less and less upon remote Utopia, more and more upon the immediate and practical reform. Hard already to define, Socialism would soon almost escape definition altogether. It would become much less of a science and much more of a religion. Soon the simple old test, Do you accept the Marxian theory of value, would be meaningless. "Socialism, I say again, is not a system of economics. It is life for the dying people." These were the words of Keir Hardie, the first protagonist of the Independent Labour Party. Not a system of economics! We have travelled far indeed from Marx and the Social Democratic Federation.

Inevitably, such an organisation and such a doctrine attracted MacDonald. It was as practical and as English as Fabianism, and far more emotional. But, unlike Fabianism, it was not content to practise permeation and to leave political power to the established parties. It aimed at political power for itself. And MacDonald

was quite clear as to the desirability of that. In 1896, indeed, he would, unsuccessfully, demand the suppression of a Fabian tract in which Bernard Shaw had asserted that the Fabians should even oppose a hopeless Socialist candidature for Parliament, "in order to secure the victory of the better of the two candidates between whom the contest really lies." Certain experiences of his own decided MacDonald in 1894, the second year of its existence, to join the I.L.P. Already there had been some negotiations as to the possibility of his becoming a Liberal-Labour candidate for Dover. This was in the recognised Fabian tradition. He was a Socialist, but Socialists should permeate the older parties. Then there came a proposal from Southampton, where the Radicals had been stirred by some Socialist lectures and were looking for a Labour man to run in harness with an orthodox Liberal for their two member constituency. Negotiations followed, and broke down. Orthodoxy had triumphed. Later in the same year, at a by-election at Attercliffe, the Liberals declined to adopt a Trade Union candidate, and the I.L.P. brought out a champion of their own.

For MacDonald, after his own experiences at Southampton, Attercliffe was the last straw. He decided to join the I.L.P. and wrote at once to Keir Hardie.

To J. Keir Hardie.

20 Duncan Buildings,
Baldwin Gardens, E.C.
15th July, 1894.

MY DEAR HARDIE,

I am now making personal application for membership of the I.L.P. I have stuck to the Liberals up to now, hoping that they might do something to justify the trust that we had put in them. Attercliffe came as a rude awakening, and I felt during that contest that it was quite impossible for me to maintain my position as a Liberal any longer. Calmer

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consideration has but strengthened that conviction, and if you now care to accept me amongst you I shall do what I can to support the I.L.P.

Between you and me there never was any dispute as to objects. What I could not quite accept was your methods. I have changed my opinion. Liberalism, and more particularly local Liberal Associations, have definitely declared against Labour, and so I must accept the facts of the situation and candidly admit that the prophecies of the I.L.P. relating to Liberalism have been amply justified. The time for conciliation has gone by and those of us who are in earnest in our professions must definitely declare ourselves. I may say that in the event of elections, I shall place part of my spare time at the disposal of the Party, to do what work may seem good to you.

Yours very sincerely,

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

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MacDonald now stood on the brink of his political career. Thanks to his Secretaryship, to some articles for Scottish newspapers and for the *Weekly Despatch*, and a little lecturing, he had assured himself a frugal independence. In 1891 and 1892 he had won first prizes in a short story competition in the *People's Journal*, with "A Faithful Soul" and "Lovers Twain," romantic tales of the Elgin district. He was still assiduously educating himself. For years indeed he continued to read voraciously. In his library at his death were many bound volumes of articles extracted from the *Fortnightly Review*, *The Contemporary*, *The Nineteenth Century* and other journals. Each volume contains anything up to sixty-two articles, and the subject and author of each is neatly catalogued, in MacDonald's own hand, inside the front cover. The volumes are dated, always in February or March of their various years; the earliest I have seen going back to February 1893. The subjects of the selected

articles are very various; politics and sociology predominate, but travel, literature and economics are well represented. It was a remarkable testimony to his rapid self-education that he should have been invited to write, quite extensively, for the Dictionary of National Biography. The poet Denis Florence MacCarthy (1817-1882) was his first subject. Among the rest there was a considerable sprinkling of Scottish divines, but there were also minor politicians, journalists and writers. And his is the (four column) biography of Sir William Wyndham, the ally of Bolingbroke, and that of George Peabody, the philanthropist. Sir Leslie Stephen, the Editor of the Dictionary, he always admired, not least for his prowess as a walker.

Already by the middle 'nineties his now varied contacts had brought him many acquaintances, and even admirers, with some of whom he maintained contact for years. Were there, one wonders, any intimates? For here, too, that strange dualism which coloured all his nature was apparent. No one could attract more readily; his picturesque appearance, his abounding vitality, his bursts of unaffected laughter were engaging; his seriousness, his ingenuous idealism, his obvious intellectual power, his stubborn self-reliance compelled interest or admiration. Yet how often the impalpable spiritual barrier would descend, to bar the inquiring acquaintance from the expected intimacy! Thanks in the main to a shy and sensitive pride, almost always, as the saying goes, he would keep himself to himself. To many consequently he was always a man of mystery. Mr. Bernard Shaw even recalls that, when he first met MacDonald among the Fabians, he was for some while under the impression that he was an army officer. Not only, moreover, did he find it difficult to make intimate

friends, he was apt to arouse resentments. The Fabian Executive is even said to have been relieved when he left it a few years later. For in Committee at this time he was apt to be a somewhat intransigent and angular member of minorities. The Jubilee Procession of 1897 was to pass beneath the windows of the then Fabian offices, in a now vanished section of the Strand, and the Fabians realistically proposed to raise some much-needed money by letting their window space for the occasion and, as a more or less logical sequel, to subscribe a guinea towards the decoration of the street. MacDonald was outraged—perhaps because the Kaiser was to figure in the procession. Were the Fabians to countenance and profit by the public exhibition of a tyrant? (A decade later MacDonald himself was to irritate many of his followers by accepting an invitation to lunch with the Kaiser.) He was outvoted; but on this, and similar occasions, he had bred some irritation. Politically, however, his views—perhaps it would be almost as accurate to say his instincts—were crystallising. The Social Democratic Federation had fired his emotional idealism. Fabianism, with its emphasis on realism and Blue Books, had appealed to the would-be scientist in him. In the Independent Labour Party, at once practical and idealistic, it seemed as if both sides of his nature would find scope. Outside the sphere of politics, however, he had not as yet found a satisfactory synthesis for the ineradicable dualism of his nature. As early as 1889 he had bought and read cheap translations of Renan's *Life of Jesus*, and *Saint Paul*, and *The Christian Church*, yet the crude rationalism of the London leaders of the Federation had done nothing to impair his natural mysticism. About this time, indeed, he was excitedly exploring the cloudy theology of Swedenborg. Yet this

was the man who a few years later (June 23, 1899) went on a deputation from the Moral Instruction League to the London School Board, to demand, among other things, "the introduction of moral teaching which shall make no appeal to supernatural or superhuman motives."¹ Here and there among his associates were already those who did not doubt that he was destined to achieve uncommon distinction. Miss Edith Hogg introduced him about this time to Mr. (afterwards Professor) Lyde as "the one potentially great man" among the social workers and young politicians who were her friends. "There was always greatness peeping out" Professor Lyde has told me. There is evidence of the same sort from the survivors of an informal Fleet Street group, with which, about this time, MacDonald sometimes lunched on Thursdays at the Albion Hotel, New Bridge Street. Its nucleus consisted of E. H. Spence, K.C., Mr. David Williamson, Editor of the *Windsor Magazine*, Shan Bullock, Irish littérateur, Hugh MacLauchlan, literary editor of the *Star*, and Mr. Coulson Kernahan, the novelist; while others who occasionally put in an appearance were Clement Shorter, Grant Allen, Richard le Gallienne, (Sir) Max Pemberton, (Sir) Robert Donald, and even Alfred Harmsworth, afterwards Lord Northcliffe. Even in that galaxy of future notabilities MacDonald did not go unremarked. He struck Mr. Coulson Kernahan as "a man who, intensely disliking everything 'pushful,' was ambitious, was conscious of unusual powers, and was conscious, as well as determined, that these powers should, one day, bring him to high place." He did not talk much, Mr. Kernahan noticed, and "what he said was considered"—

¹ Perhaps this is not an altogether fair antithesis. Macdonald's reasons for believing that the use of the Bible as a school textbook, "like a history or grammar," was not religious education at all, will be found in his memoir, *Margaret Ethel MacDonald*, p. 62.

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a life-long characteristic, that. Nor were these judgments merely read into the past, after MacDonald's rise. Another of this company, Mr. David Williamson, noted in a diary at the time, "A young man who will go far." And Mr. Kernahan, who kept no diary but had a habit of annotating the margins of his books, jotted against a passage in Emerson's Essay on "Self-Reliance," which he was reading at this time, "I think this applies to our friend J. R. M." The passage of Emerson ran as follows: "What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think. This rule, equally arduous in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness." But MacDonald was never easy to appraise, and inevitably opinions differed. "Nobody in the last century, as far as I can judge, supposed that he would ever cut any ice" is the verdict given me by a leading Fabian of those early days. And, if one did not detect the mysterious hinterland of the man, or the taut self-reliance, there were perhaps at this time few outward signs of the powers which usually promise high achievement. For as yet he seems not to have been a remarkable speaker, and of his writing, which was still confined to ephemeral journalism, nothing was known. The odds against him were still apparently tremendous.

In the General Election of 1895, in spite of his rejection by the Liberal Caucus in the previous year, he contested Southampton. Some working men there had persuaded him to stand as an I.L.P. candidate. He polled only 867 votes, and was one of the twenty-eight defeated I.L.P. candidates of that year. His election manifesto was both outspoken and comprehensive.

. . . I ceased to trust in the Liberal Party when I was convinced that they were not prepared to go on and

courageously face the bread-and-butter problems of the time—the problems of poverty, stunted lives, and pauper-and-criminal-making conditions of labour. Neither Tories nor Liberals have a Labour policy as we understand it. Neither of them can answer why house rents are going up in Southampton; why the struggling shopkeeper and wage-earner are reaping so little benefit from the increasing size of the town; why the unemployed difficulty is becoming more pressing. . . .

His own answer to these familiar problems was brief and unequivocal:

To our minds these questions admit of an easy answer. The monopolist owns the land and houses of Southampton, and keeps piling up a rent which he has never justly earned.

And he advocates accordingly nationalisation of the land, and in the meantime, "as a step to that end," the taxation "for local purposes" of land values. He also declares for nationalisation of the railways and of mining royalties, and indeed for the "public control of the means of production, distribution and exchange." This also, however, he recognises as a remote objective, and includes a list of more immediate measures, which he describes as "a means to this end." These include an Eight Hour Day, an Employer's Liability Bill, Reform of the Poor Law, Old Age Pensions, Municipalisation of the Drink Traffic, a Graduated Income Tax, Adult Suffrage, Home Rule all round, abolition of the House of Lords, and Payment of Members and of their election expenses. This was precisely the sort of all-embracing programme of which he came later to be mistrustful. Yet, despite its drastic comprehensiveness, he was pursued throughout the election with relentless hostility by the local branch of the Social Democratic Federation. For one thing, he had omitted to mention Karl Marx.

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Moreover, all his speeches made it clear that he was opposed by temperament to the rigid formulas of Marxism. It was the first round in a life-long battle.

A little later in his address there follows a curiously prophetic passage.

At this moment when so much is uncertain and when there is a growing suspicion as to the good faith and soundness of the old progressive politicians, there could be raised no cry more fatal to the well-being of general progress and good government than that which you hear in Southampton: "Party! Party!" The fact is, both parties have broken down. Against that cry of my opponents I am to raise the answer: "Principle! Principle!"

With few alterations, these words might have been spoken at the time of the formation of the National Government of 1931. And indeed I myself heard him quote them to a mass meeting which he addressed in this same Southampton, as Prime Minister, in 1934. Bernard Shaw went down to speak for MacDonald during that first electoral venture at Southampton. (It was a hopeless candidature, but the extreme Fabian doctrine of supporting the likeliest candidate did not apply to a member of their own executive.) Mr. Shaw remembers a great open-air meeting on a pier, and how the audience roared at the inadvertent ambiguity of MacDonald's declaration that "there are thirty thousand people in Southampton living in one room."

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At the end of that May, while he was lying ill in St. Thomas' Hospital, shortly before the Election, there reached him a letter from an unknown sympathiser, enclosing a subscription to his election fund. It was signed "M. E. Gladstone." Next month he took part in a debate on Socialism at the Pioneer Club, and Margaret

Gladstone was in the audience. She had already noted in her diary "First letter from J. R. MacDonald: May 29, 1895"; and now she added "First saw him, Pioneer Club, June 13, 1895." Shortly afterwards they met at an evening party, at the house of a married daughter of Sir Samuel Montague (first Lord Swaythling) in Kensington Palace Gardens.

Margaret Gladstone was the only child, by his second wife, of Dr. John Hall Gladstone, F.R.S. She was a great-niece—not, as has usually been said, a niece—of Lord Kelvin, through her mother, Margaret King, eldest daughter of the Rev. David King, I.L.D., a Presbyterian minister. Her mother died a fortnight after giving birth to her, and she was brought up by her father. Dr. Gladstone was both a scientist—he was a Fellow of the Royal Society at twenty-six, President, more than once, of the Chemical Society and other bodies, and is remembered for the discovery of the copper-zinc couple in electric batteries—and also a singularly active social and religious worker. He was one of the founders of the Y.M.C.A. and himself conducted a regular Sunday afternoon Bible Class in the dining-room of his large house in Pembridge Square—a class which so expanded that it was subdivided into four, and gave birth to a "Christian Corps," drawn from its inner circle, which at his death numbered over three hundred men, and included members of many different nationalities. The Gladstones were a prosperous upper middle-class family—they kept seven indoor servants at Pembridge Square—full of intelligence and good will. Dr. Gladstone was constantly going off to religious or scientific conferences at home or abroad, and would often take one or more of his daughters with him. Foreign delegates to British congresses, too, would frequently appear at

Pembridge Square. In this atmosphere Margaret grew up both deeply religious and anxiously aware of the social problem. She taught in Sunday Schools, became a manager of several Board Schools, started social work in Hoxton. Socialism began to attract her—not the theoretic aspect of it, but the human. The horror which these tendencies occasioned to some of her relatives (though not to her family) distressed and faintly amused, but did not deter, her. She was a shy young woman, of much courage, humour and kindness, and was gifted with imperturbable common sense and a calm inner radiance of the spirit. “She saw spirit in everything” MacDonald wrote of her afterwards. They were much the same words as he was to use both of Keir Hardie and of Jaurès, and indeed could have used of most of those to whom he came closest. With the healthy and bright-eyed comeliness which can be seen in photographs of her taken at this time, she was naturally attractive to young men, and at least four suitors had been formally rejected before she met her partner. In the autumn of 1893 she had written in her diary:

I wonder whether I shall meet him in this world. I mean *my* him, my sir, my knight. I believe that each of us will meet her him or his her in some world. . . . Oh, God, Thou hast not given me Thy best gift. Oh let me make no mistake about it, and if I should use it for myself and him instead of for Thee and Thy other children, keep it from me till I am ready to have it, however far away that time may be.

After that first encounter at the Pioneer Club, they met at intervals, thanks to his work or hers—at a Socialist Club in Bride Street, or at Fabian meetings, or in Hoxton. She had no doubts now that she had found her “him.” He was introduced to the family circle at Pembridge

Square. There were appointments at the British Museum (where MacDonald often read)—into which “she brought all the sunshine of the world and all its seriousness with her.” It was on the steps of the British Museum, in the midsummer of 1896, that they became engaged. “I hope you will like him,” she wrote to a sister, “though I don’t suppose you will like his opinions.” Her father and sisters, however, received the newcomer kindly. On the day of the engagement a son was born by an elder sister, and at evening prayers in Pembridge Square Dr. Gladstone prayed “for him who has lately come among us.” It was not quite clear to the family whether he was referring to the baby or the fiancé, but on the whole opinion inclined to the latter. That summer Dr. Gladstone took a house on the edge of Blackheath, above Chilworth Station, and through the long, sunny days the two wandered happily over the open heather which stretched to the south. MacDonald was now thirty. After his fiercely self-contained and Spartan youth a new world was opening to him. They were married in November.



*Margaret Gladstone, whom MacDonald married in November,
1896.*

IV

NUCLEUS OF A CAREER

1896-1900

IT IS certainly not too much to say that for MacDonald a new life began with marriage. And though it was the opinion, no doubt the correct opinion, of more than one shrewd observer, who knew him before it, that, come what may, he was destined to achieve great distinction, it is certain that his marriage both helped him prodigiously to achieve it and continued intimately to affect his career—long after the death of his wife. All this is doubtless true of almost any successful marriage, but of this marriage it is specially true. “She saw spirit in everything.” Henceforth that faint streak of the rationalist, of the merely sceptical, which can, I think, be detected in MacDonald’s earlier years, begins to fade out of him. Never orthodox, never attached to formal religion, he, too, nevertheless saw spirit in everything, did not doubt the existence of what he called “the grand, crowned authority of life.” And inevitably this affected his politics, as well as his philosophy. It gave him, for one thing, the readiest access to the sympathies of Labour audiences, always responsive to the religious note in political appeals. It carried him further still from the bleak materialism of Marx. “His conviction that there was ‘soul everywhere,’” he wrote significantly of the French Socialist leader, Jaurès, “was transformed by him into a firmly-held political method. . . . Jaurès rejected Marxism because he saw ‘soul

everywhere.” In its influence upon his own character, too, the companionship of the remarkable woman he had married was potent. In many ways her gifts were the complement of his own. Her simple and unaffected kindness, her rich capacity for friendship made of the periodic gatherings in their new home something at once more homely and more inspiring than a mere political salon. “Amidst her guests” MacDonald wrote, “she moved, chatting, cheering, introducing, for her wonderful memory for names and faces and her vigilant sympathy made her a perfect hostess for a great crowd.” These were precisely the qualities he needed in his partner, and there were those, in whom his own sensitive aloofness of spirit had hitherto left some lingering suspicions, who now finally abandoned their misgivings. Moreover, the deep inner tranquillity of her nature soothed and allayed the impatience, the harassing self-questionings to which his always artistic temperament was liable. Nor, less significant though they were than the varied spiritual and psychological resources of a happy marriage, can a biographer overlook the material advantages of the economic independence which came with his wife’s moderate, but assured, private income. MacDonald readily acquired the manners, though not the prejudices, of what is called the ruling class. Only those who know nothing of the British Labour movement will underestimate the significance of that. The British wage-earner has never hated and mistrusted the middle-class, as by all the Marxist canons he should have. On the contrary, he has admired and, as far as possible, in dress, habits and social conventions, has imitated it. In club, chapel, and Party branch, wherever there was an opportunity, he has constantly advanced members of that class to office. And he has always respected politicians

for whom a political career was known not to spell economic advancement. When MacDonald was elected Secretary of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, it was of decisive importance that he did not depend upon the Trade Unions for an income. And as a handful of enthusiasts expanded into a nation-wide party, no one could be better suited for the national leader who would some day be required than one who, though he had sprung from the humblest origins and had never lost contact or sympathy with the poor, possessed the external characteristics to which the country was accustomed in its rulers.

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After a short honeymoon, they came to their new home, a flat at 3 Lincoln's Inn Field, at the end of November. They stood looking out at the cold winter sunlight gleaming on the bare branches of the trees, and, as they turned away from the windows, her eye caught a picture, "The Happy Warrior," which a friend had given them. "Will it be like that?" she asked. . . . For the New Year they were at Lossiemouth. MacDonald's wife, who had not known a mother herself, took naturally and warmly to his mother, and the Morayshire countryside enchanted her. Early in January 1897 they came back to Lincoln's Inn Field and their new life. Gradually they were to build up here a home which would be an extraordinary compromise between private and public life. The young wife's first anxiety was that their home should be "open." Marriage was to make no difference to their active work. It was an exacting resolve, more exacting than she knew. For ten years—for the custom was reluctantly abandoned when MacDonald was elected to Parliament—their house was filled, every three weeks or so, with a throng of men and women prominent or

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active in the Labour and Socialist worlds, and with a growing number of foreign visitors to London. Their children, as they came, were fitted heroically into the scheme. Professor Lyde recalls a crowded evening at which Keir Hardie was present, and responded to an insistent appeal for "a few words." To accommodate the audience, doors were all set open and the children were bundled into the smallest room, and locked in, to ensure quiet. Another friend of those days recalls his first visit—"Come early" had been added on his postcard invitation—and how he was given coffee and a ham sandwich, and leaned against a bookcase and listened to J. A. Hobson, the economist, holding forth on a new life of Ruskin, with Herbert Burrows, of the S.D.F., in the offing, and how every wall seemed lined with books, and the crowding guests overflowed from one room to another, and, later, he was commandeered to hand round ham sandwiches and coffee himself, and how he could not help wondering whether the clearing up after all this would not be a formidable task for Mrs. MacDonald. On another occasion the bedroom of one of the boys served as a cloakroom, and his bed was soon piled so high with coats that the small, unnoticed occupant began to fear that he was to be smothered. The informality with which, at these friendly gatherings, the unknown stranger could rub shoulders with the lions of the insurgent politics and literature of the day provided the youthful Labour movement with a genuine social centre, which in its maturity, when centrifugal forces gathered impetus, it never afterwards possessed. The hostess was the soul of these gatherings.

It is difficult to believe (wrote a visitor from British Columbia to MacDonald, after her death) that if I return again to England and mount your stairs, I shall not see that happy

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young woman who received me as though I had been an old friend. I was lonely till that night and was beginning to hate England. Nobody was interested in me. I had been civilly received, and that was all. But five minutes in your house were enough to banish my bad mood. It was all the more wonderful because I was nobody in particular, and she took as much pains with me as though I had been one of the important men I met that night.

It is curious to reflect that, later in his career, his followers' most familiar criticism of MacDonald should have been that he was "a bad mixer."

Even when, with MacDonald's election to Parliament, the regular gatherings were given up, the house remained a social focus. In the early summer of 1910 Mrs. MacDonald wrote to a friend :

The visitors from the ends of the earth are pouring in thick and fast. How we are to manage even to *see* all the people who have been kind to us in their own countries and now are here, I do not know. Yesterday G—, our very special Indian official friend, turned up, and we had him to lunch at the House to-day. This afternoon Vida Goldstein (from Australia) came in and found the sewing-party in full swing. This morning an Indian doctor came. Yesterday four callers met on the door-step, none of them knowing each other.

Not only was their home to be in this sense "open." Its mistress was to bear, and bring up, six children, without surrendering, indeed while steadily expanding, her own public work. And of this—chiefly for the Women's Industrial Council and the National Union of Women Workers, but also on something like a host of other committees, crusades and personal investigations—there was a very great deal. Indeed it is not too much to say that she actively concerned herself with every question

of interest to women which was publicly discussed between 1896 and 1911. Yet no one who pursued so many public interests could have been further from becoming one of those mere sitters upon committees, those desiccated agitators of good causes, who sterilise personal and family life in the interests of public activity. A friend remembers being with her at Lincoln's Inn Fields when there was a knock at the door, and the entire family entered, headed by the eldest, to announce, with giggles, that it was a Deputation to draw her attention to the neglect of children in that part of London. But in fact, despite these immense and increasing demands upon her energies, she never ceased to put her family first. Her husband has left a vivid picture of one of the many moments when the two rôles overlapped.

Her children . . . played round her, and on her knee as she worked; she laid them down on the floor when they were tiny and with an eye upon them she discussed things with visitors. A nod or a word to them came as a parenthesis. I can see her now in these morning days sitting at the big black table, a little bundle lying at her side, from which arms and legs waved and a gurgle of joy came, she looking over her arm every now and again and joining in the baby ripplings, whilst the sun poured down upon both from the wide-open windows.

They lived with frugal simplicity—it was difficult to persuade her to dress even respectably—and with the sketchiest of domestic assistance—MacDonald always made their porridge himself. There was no resident servant, a charwoman came morning and afternoon and a young girl took the babies out. A relative remembers their home as “full of literature and litter and small children.” Toys, Blue-Books and pamphlets jostled each

other on floors and shelves. For a while, as will appear, they even housed the only offices of the nascent Labour Party, and the click of typewriters was added to the varied sounds produced by a healthy and growing family. "The baby's binder," writes Mrs. Lucy Herbert, "might momentarily be buried by a heap of Blue-Books, or the latest pamphlet on Arbitration Courts obscured by a discarded pinafore, but Mrs. MacDonald's equanimity was imperturbable, and her mastery of every situation complete."

It was not a luxurious, or a restful, home. Friends sometimes suspected that bananas were the MacDonalds' staple food. One remembers being invited in by Mrs. MacDonald, after an unemployed demonstration near Trafalgar Square, to cocoa, bananas, biscuits and cheese. While they were busy with this impromptu repast, MacDonald himself came back from the House, very hungry. He had had nothing to eat since breakfast, he said. "Oh, you poor dear," said his wife. "Have a banana." And he sat down, on a pile of books, to a banana and a cup of cocoa. The fact remained that amidst all these crowding activities—and the physical strain which they imposed on Mrs. MacDonald helped in time to undermine her health—the flat at 3 Lincoln's Inn Fields remained a centre which radiated friendliness, hospitality and spiritual warmth.

There was one other material advantage which marriage brought to MacDonald—the possibility of foreign travel. He made the fullest use of it. Indeed a substantial element in his later ascendancy in the councils of his party was his intimate and first-hand acquaintance, not only with foreign affairs but with foreign statesmen. They began their foreign expeditions early, with a sort of second honeymoon in Canada and the United States,

in August 1897. They went to New York, and thence to Toronto, where the British Association was meeting, and to Winnipeg, and back into the States, to Chicago, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Boston and Philadelphia, and so again to New York. They saw the sights—Niagara, the Algonquin Park, a Menonite settlement, an Indian moose-hunt—with all the exhilaration of children. They talked American politics—Bryan had just fought his first great contest. Above all, they made friends. There was Jane Addams, of Hull House, Chicago, and Mrs. J. T. Field at Manchester-by-the-Sea, and Governor Altgelt, and many others. Most of these friends—and it was the same on their subsequent journeys—remained in close contact with them throughout life. “They sent their friends to us, and we sent ours to them. They have been our neighbours ever since.” In the spring of 1899 they were in Switzerland. Later in the same year, “just to be together and wander off the beaten track and forget the world,” in Orkney; in 1900 in Oberam-magau. To the end of his life MacDonald retained his passion for travel

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Such was the home and such the stimulating new life which, in the first years after his marriage, was being built up as the base of MacDonald’s future activities. Not that that was by any means the deliberate purpose of the home. Like almost all other public men, MacDonald was frequently charged with, and much more frequently suspected of, overmastering personal ambition. This is an accusation whose importance is seldom easy to assess, and which it is never possible entirely to rebut. In a sense all men of parts are liable and, as many of them have pleaded, rightly liable, to this “last infirmity of noble minds.” But if, in

MacDonald's case, the charge is meant to suggest, either that he was ready to place private advantage before the public interest, or that personal ambition improperly moulded the shape of his career, it is demonstrably false. Whatever else may be thought of his conduct during the war of 1914 to 1918, it was not that of a man who rated his own personal prospects above what he held to be the interests of the state; while there is no doubt that his own reference, to his "thinking of giving up the thankless strife and returning to my own home and children and household shrines," represented a state of mind to which he was constantly, perhaps even too constantly, liable. Perhaps the truth about MacDonald's ambition is best expressed by saying that there are some men who neither desire nor expect to achieve special distinction or power, some who are determined, come what may, to achieve power for its own sake, and some who desire it, but desire it chiefly in order that they may use it for what they believe to be good ends. MacDonald belonged to this last category. That is the opinion of Dr. Stanton Coit of the Ethical Church, a shrewd judge of character, who saw much of him at this time. MacDonald would tell him frankly that he hoped to become a leader of political Labour, that this was to be his life's work, and that for that reason, though he spoke frequently for the Ethical Societies, he could not accept a salary or become one of their regular propagandists.

MacDonald was now in a position to look forward to a life of activity, usefulness and, probably, of distinction. In many ways, as we have seen, his marriage had profoundly affected his prospects. Moreover the nucleus of his political career, though inconspicuous as yet, was already established. First and foremost, there was the

Independent Labour Party. He had joined it in 1894, and was elected to its National Administrative Council in 1896. In these early years Keir Hardie, Bruce Glasier, Philip Snowden and MacDonald were to be the I.L.P.'s most influential spokesmen, but scores of men and women, unknown or forgotten, had already devoted themselves with astonishing enthusiasm to its propaganda. They had not been fired by an intellectual dogma, these devotees; they embarked on what was for most of them almost a religious crusade because they *felt* that there was something rotten in the state of Britain. The Marxian doctrine of class struggle and catastrophic change was foreign to all their instincts. Their propaganda at this time tended to combine, in proportions which varied with individual temperament, demands for concrete, immediate and not necessarily Socialist reforms (such as the Eight Hour Day) with a much vaguer adumbration of the moral ideals, rather than the economic details, of an ultimate Socialist Commonwealth, dimly discernable at some unknown distance beyond the controversies of the moment. For MacDonald there was an integral logical connection between the two pictures. He had studied biology, and in the doctrine of advance through catastrophe he never found it possible to believe. Society *grew*; he never doubted that. And the immediate reforms were, so to speak, but a cross-section of its process of growth towards a new shape. Society, as he saw it, was constantly "developing towards" Socialism. And, in the speeches of this early propagandist phase, it is already the immediate reform, the concrete process of growth, rather than the nebulous ultimate Utopia, on which he lays stress. He was only too conscious that of the vaguer idealism, the mere enunciation of Socialist first principles, there was already

plenty and to spare in the repertoire of his colleagues. There is an illuminating report in a local Labour journal, the *Rochdale Labour News*, of an address on "What we have now to do" which he delivered in October, 1896—between his engagement and his marriage.

The Speaker appealed for Socialists more frequently to put themselves in the position of the man in the street, who is on the whole sympathetic but who does not want to follow out economic complexities. We can talk Socialism seriously to him and we will likely disgust him; we may gas sentimentalities to him and we may capture a member who will only be one more impossibilist in our movement; we may show him what we can do now, show him that we are as interested as he is in doing the smaller things that lie at our feet, and he will become a valuable supporter. . . . He therefore urgently recommended the alliance of the Independent Labour Party with the two or three leading questions in progressive politics at the moment. We have in fact two great duties to perform at this moment. We have to preach Socialism and familiarise the public with our opinions and general standpoint, on the one hand, and on the other we have to convince the genuine progressist who is not an out-and-out Socialist that in our hands the minor, as we think, reforms are quite safe. The high superiority of so many Socialists to the political interests of their day was all very well when a nucleus of chosen souls was being formed for the Party. Now we want a little more generosity, a little closer application to facts, a little more honest recognition of our duty as a political party.

Beneath the doubtless sketchy reporting, all this is unmistakably MacDonald. There is the shrewd common sense, the faintly irritable impatience with impossibilists and chosen souls and gassers of sentimentality, the steady eye for the man in the street. It might have come from almost any period of his career. It was in the same temper that, at an International Socialist and Trade Union

Congress in London this year, he opposed Tom Mann and Keir Hardie, and supported Hyndman and his S.D.F., in successfully resisting the admission of anarchists.

Then there were the Fabians, on whose executive he served from 1894 to 1900. And here, curiously enough, as I have noted already, he was regarded by his colleagues as one of those unpractical intransigents whom he was himself denouncing in the I.L.P., and was to spend his political life in counter-working in many varieties of organisation. This attitude was due in part, no doubt, to youthful impatience with Fabian tactics. It may conceivably have owed something too to his lack of sympathy for Sidney Webb, the arch-expert of Fabianism. Certainly, in the opinion of leading Fabians, MacDonald carried this faintly hostile intransigence even on to the London County Council, on which he represented Central Finsbury from 1901 to 1904. He had stood first for the Council in 1898, on a programme which included municipal gas, water and drains, taxation of land values, a municipal death-duty on landed property, and the putting "to purposes of public utility" of "the whole property of the City Guilds." While MacDonald was a member of the Council, Webb, as Chairman of its Technical Education Committee, whose authority was very wide, was maturing his scheme for the London School of Economics, and more than one Fabian, to whom MacDonald seemed to be showing inexplicable signs of hostility to Webb, expected him, quite unjustifiably as it proved, to resist the necessary grant when it was proposed. It was under these circumstances that Bernard Shaw decided to send him a letter of advice. The letter, as far as I know, does not survive, but Mr. Shaw has told me that he informed MacDonald that he had been suspected by the Fabians of being an I.L.P.

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spy, and by the I.L.P. of being a spy of the Fabians, and, further, that his tactics on the L.C.C. were not calculated to advance either his cause or himself. He assumed, not unnaturally, that this missive would mean the permanent severance of their relations. To his surprise, MacDonald's reply showed that he had taken no offence. Tactful and full of shrewd common sense, it persuaded Shaw for the first time that there were the makings of a successful Parliamentarian in MacDonald. Long afterwards, he spoke of MacDonald's "very remarkable development from the most intractable of *frondeurs*, always in opposition, to the able and adroit Parliamentarian who became the only possible Prime Minister in the Labour Party." The qualities, however, which Shaw had now first detected, had certainly not suddenly developed at the turn of the century. They had been present in the Curator of the Lossiemouth Field Club as certainly as in the member of the London County Council. It seems likely that what had happened was merely that Shaw had been allowed to observe for the first time a new facet in a complex personality.

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It was the controversy over the South African War which ended MacDonald's association with the Fabians. He was a member of the Administrative Council of the I.L.P., as well as of the Fabian executive. And for the I.L.P. the war was but one more, particularly glaring, illustration of the accepted Socialist theory that all wars are promoted by Capitalists in order to obtain profit. Indeed five months before war broke out they had issued a manifesto, which referred to "the criminal conduct of the Government," whose policy "can be explained only on the supposition that their intention has been to secure complete control in the interests of unscrupulous

exploiters." The Fabians, however, were divided. Their left wing, those who had joined them by way of the Social Democratic Federation, or were associated with the I.L.P., united with their right wing, of Liberals, against the centre. The central majority held both that the South African issue was one "which Socialism cannot solve and does not touch," and, further, as Shaw put it in his pamphlet *Fabianism and the Empire*, that

. . . a Great Power consciously or unconsciously must govern in the interests of civilisation as a whole; and it is not to those interests that such mighty forces as gold-fields, and the formidable armaments that can be built upon them, should be wielded irresponsibly by small communities of frontiersmen. Theoretically they should be internationalised, not British-Imperialised; but until the Federation of the World becomes an accomplished fact we must accept the most responsible Imperial federations available as a substitute for it.

After a period of inconclusive controversy, there was a postal referendum of members, and the proposal that the Society should publicly denounce the war was lost. About fifteen members resigned at once. Among these were Mrs. MacDonald, Mrs. Pankhurst and George N. Barnes, and two members of the Executive—MacDonald himself and one J. Frederick Green, known to his colleagues as Baldheaded Green. Curiously enough it was this same Baldheaded Green who, having become an enthusiastic supporter of the war of 1914 to 1918, was to defeat MacDonald at Leicester as a Coalition candidate in the election of 1918. MacDonald had had no hesitations in preferring the views of the I.L.P. to those of the Fabians. For him, as for the I.L.P., the war was violence in the interests of exploitation. But perhaps, in the last analysis, what mattered most to him was just this, that

it was violence. All violence and all disorder he detested, with a deep, instinctive repugnance. And this was the violence of the strong against the weak. For MacDonald, the South African war was a rehearsal on a small scale of the major martyrdom of the greater war—with this significant exception, that now his wife was beside him. Together they joined a National Stop-the-War Committee, entertained delegates from South Africa and appeared at Peace Meetings. At most of these public demonstrations there was violence and disorder. Mr. Lloyd George, who displayed great courage, was the most prominent of the so-called pro-Boers, but MacDonald bore his full share. There is a story of his coming out with John Dillon, the Irish Member, and one other companion, from the platform door of the Queen's Hall, after an anti-war meeting, to find an angry crowd waiting for them. An ugly growl went up as they appeared, and sticks and fists waved threateningly. MacDonald simply said "Come on" to his companions, and at once began to push his way through the crowd. And though from all sides there was a thrust of angry, shouting men struggling towards them, those immediately in front of him, and of the two companions who followed close behind him, gave way as he ploughed his way calmly through the mob. In less than ten minutes they were in Oxford Street. "It's good to have faced that lot!" said MacDonald. It was obvious that he had thoroughly enjoyed himself. He always enjoyed danger.

Mrs. MacDonald was hissed by some ladies in evening dress as she was leaving a house, in a fashionable quarter of London, at which there had been a meeting addressed by a deputation from South Africa. She turned and faced them. "What have you to say?" she asked. Taken aback, they did not reply, and she went on: "Does shame

make you women dumb? If a working woman went into the streets as you do, her cheeks would burn with a sense of disgrace." She walked off, unmolested.

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Yet another of MacDonald's affiliations during these years of initiation was with the Ethical Movement. Mr. A. G. Gould remembers looking in at the premises of the East London Ethical Society on Sunday, June 12, 1898, and finding "a tall gaunt young Scotsman holding forth learnedly in the broadest of accents to a somewhat bewildered audience of thirty." And a year or two later MacDonald actually took the Chair—and displayed notable powers of discipline—at the annual meeting of the Union of Ethical Societies. The motives of his association with the Ethical Societies are sufficiently explained in the course of the manifesto in which, in June, 1898, he was one of a dozen signatories, including J. A. Hobson and Dr. Stanton Coit, who announced that they had formed themselves into a Society of Ethical Propagandists. Ethical Societies, explained the manifesto, "are founded upon a conviction that the good life is desirable for its own sake, and rests upon no supernatural sanction." They did not require their adherents necessarily to disbelieve in the supernatural. But they insisted that good is good, and that man recognises it as such, independently of divine authority. For MacDonald at least, association with the Ethical Movement was far from meaning that he did not believe in the supernatural—in that omnipresent "spirit," of which he was always so conscious and to which he so often referred. What it did mean was that he was not prepared to accept the dogma of any formal church, and that he believed at this time that a secular ethical society might be more active in social reform than any religious

organisation. At Southampton, and elsewhere, he had been antagonised by religious bodies which appeared to measure a candidate's eligibility by the length of his purse. But, above all, it meant that he was conscious of the need to moralise the Labour movement. After professing "the strongest sympathy with the demands for a just and human ordering of industrial life . . . which are gathered together under the general title of the Labour movement" the manifesto goes on to emphasise the anxiety of the signatories to "secure a fully conscious recognition among Labour men of the moral implications of their economic revolt." For MacDonald had none of the Victorian Radicals' faith in the automatic virtue and wisdom of "the people." Few insurgent democrats can have embarked upon politics with so few illusions about democracy. An essay on *The People in Power* which he contributed to a collection, *Ethical Democracy*, published in 1900, begins "The faith that the voice of the people is the voice of God is now about thirty years out of date." Democracy, he points out, took more interest in obtaining the vote than it had since shown in using it. "Why" he asks, doubtless remembering his experience at Southampton, "are votes cast less and less on political issues and more and more on such foreign considerations as whether a candidate subscribes to chapel funds, is a large local employer and promises to bring trade to the town, or is a liberal friend of sport?" And he goes on to a shrewd and realistic anatomy of democracy, in which he distinguishes the old conception of political liberty ("atomic individualism") from the new conception of social liberty ("organic individualism"). He draws a distinction between the early Collectivism of Shaftesbury and that which was now being demanded. The one was negative, a mere

abolition of crying evils, the other positive, an active promotion of justice. He believes in the future of democracy, for he recognises that, though on one isolated issue "it might be easy to find a small class with a somewhat higher ideal than the public," on a whole complex of issues no class is likely to be so wise as "the general body of the people." But he realises that the new democracy is faced with formidable problems and requires arduous self-discipline. With its references to Mill and le Bon, Halifax and de Tocqueville, it is an acute, erudite and polished performance for the ex-pupil of Drainie School, and was sufficient evidence that he was likely to move opinion with his pen as well as on the platform and in the committee-room. Indeed MacDonald was already a practised free-lance journalist. He had already written frequently for various Scottish papers and for the *Weekly Despatch*. Soon he was to be a professional leader-writer on the *Echo*. In 1897 he had helped to found the *Progressive Review*, which survived for a year. And a little later he had written a weekly Labour *Causerie* in the *New Age*. But first was to come the great event which ensured his political future, the foundation of the Labour Party.

V

BIRTH OF A PARTY

1900-1906

IN 1899 there existed, for effective purposes, only three Socialist organisations in Britain. There was the Social Democratic Federation, condemned to prolonged impotence by the intransigence of Hyndman and its rigid Marxian dogma. There were the Fabians, respectable, realistic, moderate and, above all, permeative, whom few foreign insurgents would have recognised as Socialists at all. And there was the Independent Labour Party, which, though it had preferred to assume this disreeter and slightly disingenuous title, was in fact, as we have seen, albeit on the milder British model, a body of actively proselytising Socialists. The three did not find it easy to co-operate. Fusion between I.L.P. and S.D.F. was long debated, but invariably proved impracticable. The solid figure of Hyndman and the grim shadow of Marx stood inexorably between them. Nor did I.L.P. and Fabians find harmony much easier. Mr. Bernard Shaw has been kind enough to tell me of "a very unpleasant Fabian meeting where the I.L.P., headed by Keir Hardie, had attacked the Fabians as being leaders with no followers, whereupon I had deplored the predicament of a movement hung up between two Societies, one of which consisted of leaders with no followers and the other of followers with no leaders." The uneasy relations between the two Societies probably account for the critical judgments which the Fabians

of those days are apt to pass upon MacDonald, who was a member of the executives of both. To the founders of the I.L.P. it had been evident from the first that their only prospect of wide and effective political influence would lie in what Hardie called "the great alliance," some sort of co-operation, that is, with the trade unions, with their large, organised membership and their considerable financial resources. Until this alliance could be established, the prospects of the I.L.P., with its exiguous membership, must remain nebulous in the extreme. Moreover its original impetus soon appeared to be flagging. At the Election of 1895 none of its twenty-eight candidates was returned, and Hardie lost his seat for West Ham. The President of the Trades Union Congress observed bitterly that "the outcome of their hopeless electioneering campaign was . . . to convert the term "Labour" candidate into a by-word of reproach and mistrust, and finally to unmistakably demonstrate that the worst enemies of Labour might be those of their own household." This hardly augured well for the prospects of the "great alliance." And in 1895 the Trades Union Congress accepted three significant changes in its constitution, all of them aimed at the Socialists. The Trades Councils, which were seed-beds of the new ideals, were excluded from future Congresses; none but those actually working at their trades were henceforth to qualify as delegates—so that Hardie, for one, would attend no more Congresses. And in future voting was to be on the "card" system—the vote of a delegate would count, not one, but a number representing the membership of his Union. The consequence of this last change was that in 1895 Hardie's Socialist resolution, which had been carried by large majorities in 1893 and 1894, was rejected by 607,000 votes to 186,000. At the

Congresses of 1897 and 1898 there were motions for the establishment of a political fund for Independent Labour Representation. They were heavily defeated. A few Unions already supported Members of their own, but a common fund for representatives of other Unions as well, and for representatives who were apparently to be professed Socialists at that—this was a very different affair. In 1899 a similar proposal was once more overwhelmed. But the same objective was covertly approached from a different angle in another resolution at this same Congress. It was proposed that the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress should be instructed “to invite co-operation of all the Co-operative, Socialist, Trade Union and other working-class organisations, to jointly co-operate . . . in convening a special Congress of representatives . . . to devise ways and means for securing the return of an increased number of Labour Members to the next Parliament.” This resolution, proposed by the Railway Servants, had been drafted in the offices of Hardie’s *Labour Leader*, some say by Hardie, others, by MacDonald, and probably by both in collaboration. Its phraseology is not graceful, but it was immensely diplomatic, and big with political consequences. The “great alliance” was now at hand. Discreetly, nothing had been said about a political fund. Even so, there was a heated debate, in the course of which a delegate asserted that not one trade unionist in ten thousand would take any interest in the proposal. It was carried, however, by 546,000 votes to 434,000. Nobody quite knew what it meant.

MacDonald and Hardie, however, were quite clear as to what they hoped it would mean. The next step was to remove the task of arranging the coming Conference from the purview of the Parliamentary

THE LIFE OF JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD

Committee of the Trades Union Congress. This "Cabinet of organised Labour" was not only still predominantly Liberal but was habituated by long custom to politely ignoring inconvenient instructions from its constituents. Fortunately for the Independents, the official Committee was so sceptical of the whole affair that there was little difficulty in arranging for a special *ad hoc* Committee to deal with it. And, what was more, this special Committee was to contain only four members from the official Parliamentary Committee of Congress, and six from the three Socialist societies. Amongst these six were MacDonald, Keir Hardie and Bernard Shaw. The Committee held several meetings. Shaw still regarded MacDonald as "the most intractable of *frondeurs*." MacDonald's opinion of Shaw was not much more complimentary. "I remember him," he recalled of these days, "as a red-headed person whom nobody knew, who was writing for Mrs. Besant's *Monthly Corner* and whose jokes I generally thought bad." In spite of these mutual misconceptions, the two men, representing a combination of sagacity and brilliance, were admirably qualified to co-operate. It was decided to summon a special Conference. A basis for its deliberations had been drafted by MacDonald, and was readily accepted by the Committee. This was his first far-reaching political stroke. There must be a resolution, he had decided, in favour of "a distinct Labour group in Parliament," with its own Whips and its own policy, "which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which . . . may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interest of labour." Discreetly calculated, this, to allay the anxieties of Liberal Trade Unionists. Moreover this Labour group was to consist not of Socialists, but of "men sympathetic with the

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aims and demands of the Labour movement.” Indeed, although the eight proposed resolutions contained detailed provision for the financial basis of the new organisation, and for its relation to the Trades Union Congress, from first to last there was no mention of Socialism. In spite of which, on the proposed Labour Representation Committee of twenty-eight, with twelve representatives of the Unions and ten of the Co-operative Societies, there were to be two representatives of the I.L.P., two of the S.D.F., and two of the Fabians. Altogether, the decisions which MacDonald had persuaded the preparatory Committee to accept, were at once extremely illogical and admirably practical. The Conference followed them with remarkable fidelity.

This fateful assemblage met in the Memorial Hall, Faringdon Street, on February 27 and 28, 1900. It had some dangerous moments to surmount. There was the inevitable resolution which would have restricted the Committee to working merely for the return of working-class Liberals, “sympathetic with the aims and demands of the Labour movement.” There was the equally inevitable proposal of the Social Democratic Federation, that the new organisation should be “based upon the recognition of the class-war,” and should “have for its ultimate object the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange.” Both were rejected in favour of the middle course, already laid down by MacDonald in his preparatory draft, and now moved by Hardie, which proposed a “distinct Labour group in Parliament who should have their own Whips and agree upon their policy.” The new party was to be neither Liberal nor Socialist, but Labour. The strategy had been MacDonald’s. Its results are written across every page of subsequent British history.

The new body now created was to be known as the Labour Representation Committee, a title with the most respectable of Liberal associations. Not till 1906 would it transform itself into the Labour Party. This judicious and ambiguous modesty was highly characteristic. The men of 1893 had in fact been Socialists. They called themselves an Independent Labour Party. The men of 1900 were in fact an Independent Labour Party. They called themselves a Labour Representation Committee. As to Socialism, their resolutions said not a word. However—although the Conference would not have dreamed of passing a Socialist resolution—with a characteristic and salutary absence of logic it agreed that the future Executive Committee should include seven trade unionists, with as many as five members of the Socialist societies—two of the I.L.P., two from the S.D.F. and one from the Fabians. The numerical strength of the Socialist organisations—70,000 Socialists were represented as against half a million Trade Unionists—did not of course entitle them to anything like this representation. The original proposal, in fact, had been for twelve trade unionists and six socialists. This would have meant two Fabians, one of whom would have been Bernard Shaw. Mr. Shaw, who remembers this transaction with approval, has been good enough to tell me of it. The Labour Representation Committee, he writes:

was formed by the Socialist societies and their leaders, with its doors open to the trade unions as such, no matter what their opinions of Socialism (mostly contemptuously hostile) might be. As their voting numbers were overwhelming and their money indispensable, they would have swept out all the Socialists and replaced them with old Conservative or Lib-Lab trade union secretaries if the L.R.C. had been



MARGARET AND RAMSAY MACDONALD

3 *Lincoln's Inn Fields*, 1903

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democratically constituted; so we fell back on the good old Tory device of *ex officio* members. The Fabian Society, with less than 2,000 members, all middle class to the marrow of their bones, was actually allowed two members *ex officio*. I was one of them, Edward Pease was the other.

Keir Hardie was determined to get rid of this clever bourgeois element, and more especially of me. . . . Besides K. H. had learnt from experience, as I also had, that mixed committees of clever bureaucrats and journalists and of genuine Labour men will not work: their brains do not go at the same speed or in the same channels. Accordingly he moved and carried the reconstitution of the committee with only one Fabian *ex officio*, and thus got rid of me (with my cordial consent), leaving Pease, as the Fabian secretary, in possession. Pease liked being on the L.R.C. and could see nothing wrong in any of its proceedings: an attitude which suited Hardie and MacDonald exactly. . . .

There remained the all-important task of choosing a Secretary for the new-born Committee. During recent years a persistent myth has made its way at intervals into print, to the effect that MacDonald owed his election to a confusion between himself and James MacDonald of the S.D.F. and the London Trades Council. Not long ago the present leader of the Labour Party gave this legend further currency, in an article in which he went so far as to suggest that MacDonald ultimately owed the premiership itself to this singularly fortunate accident. The story is entirely without foundation. The most respectable source which I have been able to discover for it is a passage in the *Further Reminiscences* (1912) of H. M. Hyndman. Hyndman, who was a persistent detractor of MacDonald, and indeed of the entire Labour Party, and who was not himself present at the Conference of 1900, quotes no authority for the rumour, save that he "was told" it. No one who was present in the Memorial Hall can have been subject

to this curious illusion. Indeed, before ever the Conference opened, anxious thought had gone to the obviously crucial question of the Secretaryship of the Party-to-be. Twelve years later, when MacDonald was elected Chairman of the Parliamentary Party, Keir Hardie recalled the pregnant episode.

I remember the anxious hours spent before the first Conference was called, trying to find someone who had the necessary qualities and abilities to undertake the most responsible of all tasks at that period—to act as Secretary to the Party. Those who had known MacDonald's work in the I.L.P. felt that he was the one man above all others who, if he could be induced to take the position, would give our then nascent movement its best chance of coming to fruition.

Moreover, far-reaching though its possibilities were, the office was virtually unpaid. It may almost be said to have gone begging, being offered to one Brocklehurst before MacDonald was unanimously elected. And yet he was an inevitable choice. Not only did he represent the I.L.P., which stood midway between the unpalatable extremes of Social Democracy and Liberal Labourism. Not only was he by now a person of some social standing and economic independence, who would never depend upon the Committee for an income. Not only could he be relied on, as the Chairman of the second Annual Conference would put it, "to conduct the movement in a gentlemanly manner." Not only had he drafted with his own hand the resolutions which had brought this new political force to birth. More than all this, his combination of rare powers—the shrewd judgment, the intellectual force, the striking eloquence, the commanding presence—were already beginning to be recognised.

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BIRTH OF A PARTY

Perhaps MacDonald was the only delegate at the Memorial Hall that February who realised the ultimate potentialities of his new post. Certainly its beginnings were sufficiently humble. There was no pay. A back room in the flat at Lincoln's Inn Fields, "so dark and unsuitable for anything else that we could not use it," served as the only office. After a year, the Secretary was voted twenty guineas "as an acknowledgment of his past services." Another year, and he was allowed £25 for office rent and a whole-time assistant at thirty shillings a week—one Conference delegate inquiring anxiously whether the Party's funds would stand so serious a drain. In 1904 it was decided to hire two small rooms in Victoria Street, and to pay MacDonald £250 per annum, out of which he should find the salary of his assistant (£100). The Executive Committee of a dozen contrived to meet in a back room in MacDonald's flat at Lincoln's Inn Fields. As Secretary, MacDonald had no right to vote, nor did he at this time play a dominating part. Often, Mr. Pease recalls, during a long discussion, he would say nothing. Then a member would turn to him and ask for his opinion. Even then he was not always over-ready to speak. The assistant, brought in in the second year, was J. S. Middleton, a young man whom MacDonald had come across in the Independent Labour Party at Workington and who had done some private work for him before now. He proved an admirable choice, and in 1939 is himself Secretary of the Labour Party. But in these first years of the century the work was novel, the circumstances were restricted and a good deal of courageous improvisation was required of all concerned. In 1903, for example, while MacDonald was abroad, there was an unexpected by-election at Barnard Castle. His assistant inadvertently

dispatched to the Division, not a summons to adopt a candidate and launch an election campaign, but the more familiar invitations for a Conference to found a local branch of the Committee. Accompanied by Pease, Hardie hurried north, and, when the Conference assembled, prudently, if unconstitutionally, used it for the more immediate purposes of the election—the result of which was to introduce to Westminster a certain Wesleyan Liberal agent, who was to become, after MacDonald and before Middleton, the Secretary of the Party's heyday—Arthur Henderson.

The work which went on, surrounded by the growing family, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, was both varied and steadily expanding. There were new branches to be formed and trade unions to be addressed all over the country. There was the annual conference to be prepared for. There were crises in the miniature Party, as when, in 1904, Richard Bell, nominally one of its three Members, sent a telegram of hearty congratulation to the Liberal who had defeated a candidate put up by the Committee itself in a by-election at Norwich. And there were all the varied stresses of a young, inexperienced and full-blooded organisation. All this MacDonald had to combine with an accumulating pressure of other duties. From beginning to end of his life he could never resist the temptation to overwork. The Independent Labour Party alone made formidable inroads upon his time. He was speaking for it all over the country, he was an energetic member of its Administrative Council, and he not only contributed to, but anxiously criticised, its organ, *The Labour Leader*, then edited by Bruce Glasier, once a Scottish shepherd, and at this time one of the most selfless and beloved of the I.L.P. evangelists.

BIRTH OF A PARTY

To Bruce Glasier.

3 Lincoln's Inn Fields,
24th January, 1903.

MY DEAR BRUCE,

I intended to write you much, long ago, but Time runs too hard for my old legs. I regret exceedingly this *Labour Leader* decision. It seems to me "now or never" is our watch-word. The *Leader* is really getting pottering. To its dullness I do not object, but if it claims the right to be dull it ought to grant us the right to have accuracy and proportion for our money. I notice that Keir Hardie is going for the draft Trade Union Bill. Surely this is a matter where some consultation was wise. He was not called into our councils and there he ought to fix his teeth. But how can he in his own paper? And so, in order to go for us, he has to growl at the Bill. It is not good business at all. . . . Again I can only regret that the *Leader* is not coming over so that we could all put our shoulders to the wheel.

With kindest regards to you all,

Yours ever,

J. R. MACDONALD.

This is the first appearance, even before they were colleagues in the House, of the complaints of Hardie's "incurrigible individualism," which, as time went on, were to come so frequently from MacDonald.

A more playful reference to the *Leader*, undated but later, may be inserted here. Glasier who, like all the early propagandists, was perpetually on the move, had apparently expected MacDonald to keep himself posted as to his whereabouts, from the announcements of meetings printed in the *Leader*.

To Bruce Glasier.

White Swan Hotel,
Halifax.

MY DEAR PERSON,

Let me say right away that I am damned if I am going to read *Leader* ads. I have already suffered enough as a "constant reader" of the intellectual parts of the paper, and

if this new duty is imposed on me, I shall go straight away over to the Liberals. Besides, if I did, are not all ads. lies? What guarantee have I that because you allow people to say you are going to be at Victoria Park or anywhere else you mean to be there? Don't I know you as well as ads.? (This is an echo of anti-militarist speeches). Your reference to the beating hearts of London is bathos—pure bathos churned up from the black depths of your being by Form IV. . . .

Love all round,

Yours ever sincerely,
J. R. M.

Then there was still speaking for the Ethical Movement to be fitted in. And speaking for numerous other organisations and causes. At Mansfield House University Settlement in Canning Town, for example, he was a regular visitor—his first address being a highly controversial discourse on the Boer War. At the Settlement he met Percy Alden, the Warden, afterwards Member for Tottenham, Dr. G. P. Gooch, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence and Dr. Lindsay, the present Master of Balliol. In 1901, thanks largely to his association with Mansfield House, he became, for a while, a professional journalist on the *Echo*, the first London evening paper to be published at a halfpenny. In 1901 Pethick-Lawrence, who had lived for two years at the Settlement in Canning Town, obtained control of the *Echo*; he was an opponent of the South African war and he introduced to the paper several men with similar views, whom he had known at the Settlement. In July 1901 MacDonald commenced a weekly article, "Work and the Workers," on the Labour movement. Signed "Spectator," it appeared for a while on the front page each Thursday. In September, he "covered" the Swansea Trades Union Congress, as a reporter. For some while he was a leader writer too, and would appear in the St. Bride Street offices at seven

in the morning to write his copy. He is said to have worked very rapidly, in a beautifully legible hand which was the delight of the compositors, and, when copy had been sent in, to have been always ready for conversation, particularly on the contents of that day's issue or the condition of Europe. One colleague, though MacDonald never succeeded in converting him to his views on the superiority of porridge as a breakfast food, always afterwards ascribed to those early morning talks his own first interest in foreign affairs. He was astonished to find how many politicians in Paris and Berlin MacDonald already personally knew. MacDonald wrote his first signed article for the *Echo* as Honorary Secretary of the Labour Representation Committee in October, 1901. It contained some interesting prophetic passages on the relations of Labour to the Liberal Party. After criticising the imperialist ambitions and domestic parochialism of the Liberal wing led by Asquith and Haldane, he turns to the Radicals who had collaborated with the I.L.P. in opposing the war.

. . . the temporary co-operation between the Radicals and the Independent Labour Party has not only taught both to respect each other, but has led to a friendly interchange of opinion which has had an influence on both sides. A round-table conference between these two sections, provided too much was not attempted, would no doubt be helpful to democratic unity. An alliance in the full sense of the word cannot be thought of, at any rate until the Radicals in the Liberal Party can be forecast more clearly. But what I take to be the supreme task of the moment is the welding of the trade union movement—with the Co-operative if possible—into a fairly solid political force, and though earnest Liberals hardly believe it, yet it is true that the task would be rendered difficult if there were well-founded suspicions abroad that the trade union movement was being captured by the Liberal Party.

So I should plead for a friendly understanding between the Radical and Independent Labour sections rather than for any new Party to include both. Personally, I look forward to a new Party which will absorb all sections working for progress, but that will not come until we are surer about our aims. Let us be content at the moment with two things.

1. A programme embodying the chief practical points of social reform immediately necessary.

2. Some arrangement for mutual help, not so much by speaking or working for each other as by securing for each other opportunities of contesting seats unhampered by third candidates. Let the help be negative first of all. Events may make it positive later on. But do not let us rush on these events.

During the Boer war pacifist views brought many Radicals and Labourites into sympathetic collaboration and, between 1914 and 1918, the first great wave of Liberal conversions to the Labour Party was due to the same cause. A more fundamental bond between them, however, which was to blur the political frontiers even more effectively, was soon to be the progressive conversion of the Liberal Party, thirty years behind their Conservative opponents, to the Collectivist doctrines which soon inspired the social insurance policy of Mr. Lloyd George.

* * * * *

Labour Representation Committee, Independent Labour Party, journalism, speaking at Ethical Societies and elsewhere—all this took time. But it was far from all. For by now MacDonald was again a Parliamentary candidate, and was assiduously nursing Leicester. He had been adopted in October, 1899, in time to be defeated at the "Khaki" Election of 1900. His speech at the adoption meeting in the Temperance Hall was a remarkable performance, both longer and much more closely

reasoned than we are accustomed to hear to-day. He referred to Charlemagne, quoted Grote and Cobden and Justin Huntly McCarthy, analysed the contradictory programmes of Liberal victors at recent by-elections, traversed the whole field of political controversy, domestic and foreign, and, as was his practice, concentrated at some length on the "half-dozen reforms requiring immediate attention." None of these—they included abolition of the House of Lords—were Socialist. Indeed the references to Socialism in his speech, which was no doubt typical of his handling at this time of an all-Party audience, are neither conspicuous nor aggressive. He points to the profits of municipal Socialism at Leicester ("it is too late to object to Socialism. You are beginning to live it") and to the success of municipal enterprises in general—whether there were in fact any profits or not was a highly controversial issue, now that the Fabians were founding a whole scheme of nationalisation on the argument from gas-and-water Socialism. Then, with the assurance that nobody expects Socialism to be realised in a day, he leaves the topic, to return to it briefly a little later, as he develops the argument that Old Age Pensions, proper housing and other reforms are impracticable without nationalisation of the land. That is all; no shibboleths, no surplus value, no socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. It was his habit not to look, or to invite his audiences to look, too far ahead. It was not as if salvation was to come by some remote catastrophe. Was not Socialism the growth, the inevitable growth, of society?

In addition to all these activities MacDonald, there can be no doubt, was already steadily and deliberately schooling himself for statesmanship. For one thing,

between 1890 and 1906 he had been reading voraciously and prodigiously. By now he was a person of wide and deeply rooted culture. Moreover all this while he had been *thinking*. His political views were profoundly stamped with his own mind, character and experience. By 1905 they were formed; they proceeded from his inmost being; nor did he ever afterwards abandon them. No one who wishes to understand the moral and philosophical basis of MacDonald's political career should overlook his *Socialism and Society* (1905). Incidentally, this book is startling evidence of the power and lucidity of the author's mind, and of the width and purposefulness of his culture. Its whole political argument is based upon the analogy with biology. It is obvious that the author has read much, and reflected deeply on history and philosophy, but it is his biological studies which colour his whole creed. It is his biological studies which convince him that Marx is not merely mistaken, but out of date—outmoded by the march of knowledge, so that “one holding modern biological views” must inevitably dissent from his old-fashioned simplifications.

The Hegelian dialectic (he writes) is unfitted to describe biological evolution. It describes superficial appearances rather than explains deep-seated causes. (This is particularly true when it is used apart from Idealism as Marx and Engels used it). It would, for instance, explain what goes on in the hedgerows in spring as an opposition between the bud and the enveloping sheath; it would be blind to the great stirring up of life from the deepest root to the highest branch tip, of which the opposition between bud and sheath is but a small—if dramatic and easily seen—incident. For this reason it cannot be dissociated from the idea of catastrophe and revolution, of accumulated energy bursting through opposition, of a simplicity of opposing forces which is never found in the actual world.

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The analogy is obvious with the naïvely over-simplified Marxian forecast of a society consisting exclusively of two sharply defined and alertly hostile forces, one owning everything and the other nothing. Biology, MacDonald explains, "had to reject explanations which assumed revolutionary changes and special creative fiats"—for the simple reason that that is not how things happen either in nature or society. And it is characteristic, both of the thoroughness of his analogy and the seriousness of his biological studies, that at this point he inserts a footnote on de Vries' then very recent theory of "mutations"—the suggestion, that is, that sometimes, instead of remaining a gradual and continuous process, evolutionary change proceeds by rapid and abrupt transformations. Even, he says, if, in due course, de Vries' theory establishes itself among biologists, it will not amount to a biological analogy to revolution. The trouble is, he perceives, that Hegel was no biologist, and that Hegel, instead of Darwin, was the intellectual progenitor of Marx. The Marxian theory of periodic cycles, separated by intervening periods of revolution, seemed to be borne out by the England which Marx knew—as far as he knew any England—the England of 1840-1870. That England, fertile source of illustrations for so many Marxian treatises, appeared to Marx and his faithful to be "the ante-chamber to a Socialist state"—a Socialist state, however, which never arrived. "The Marxian to-day still wonders why England fell from grace. England did not fall from grace. Neither Marx nor Engels saw deep enough. . . ." "The place which Marx occupies is on the threshold of scientific sociology, but hardly across it." "Socialism is inevitable, not because capitalism is to break down but because man is a reasonable being." For MacDonald the class war

belonged to the past, it "was the basis of the pre-Socialist Labour movement"—which used to elect men to Parliament, not because they held any belief in particular, but because they were working men. In a word, MacDonald did not reject Marxism, as Marxists were apt to suppose, because it was too novel and scientific for him. He rejected it because it was pre-scientific and mid-Victorian. Nor, as Marxists liked to believe, did he detest the violence to which they professed to look forward because it spelled danger and he was timid. Danger he always enjoyed; and he detested violence partly because it was cruel, but almost as much because it was unscientific.

* * * * *

Nor was it only by unremitting study and reflection that MacDonald was preparing himself for the career which he now foresaw. The foreign travel, which had begun with his marriage and, despite a growing family —there were five children by 1905—had become an almost annual custom, was an invaluable training in foreign politics. In later life MacDonald was unrivalled in his first-hand knowledge of foreign statesmen. Undoubtedly the most important expedition of these years of preparation was the visit to South Africa, soon after peace was signed in 1902. They left England on August 2, and found martial law still in force in Capetown. They travelled north to Kimberley; saw the still littered battlefields there and in Natal, explored Ladysmith and its surroundings, visited Mafeking, Pretoria, Kronstadt, drove a hundred and fifty miles behind horses in three days to Johannesburg, talked with women whose children had died in the concentration camps—they wept when Mrs. MacDonald consoled them, and gave her a present of eggs, their only possession—talked indeed with every one they met, and one pitch dark night, searching for

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shelter on the outskirts of a lonely village on the veldt, heard the ring of an unmistakable Morayshire accent and were welcomed to the fireside of an exile from Lossiemouth. One result of the journey was a remarkable booklet, *What we saw in South Africa* (1903). Without the formality of a Blue-Book, it has something like a Blue-Book's comprehensiveness. Every problem of that chaotic country is summarised and dissected, the Camps, the Repatriation Boards, the returning Boers, the English loyalists, the Dutch church—for each a solution is sketched. And in general the author's policy is—with draw Lord Milner; Union not Dominance; interfere only on the native question. For all his strong feeling against the war—"criminal," as he had thought it—which had just ended, there is a striking, indeed (it is difficult to avoid the hackneyed epithet) a statesmanlike, moderation of tone. Nevertheless, it is obvious that MacDonald felt deeply what he saw. And occasionally, as when he writes of the Boer women returned from the concentration camps, round which the bitterest of the controversy had raged in England, the temperature of his narrative rises.

I shall make no attempt to raise that vexed question again. I have heard her tell of her deportation to the tents and of her life there, but I shall reproduce nothing of that here. I simply state the fact that hundreds of women fled before our columns for months and months, preferring the hardship of the veldt to the mercy of the camps. . . . We have to face this fact, which no one who knows the country dare dispute—that the camps were a profound mistake; that families on the veldt or in caves fared better and suffered a lower mortality rate than those in camps; that the appalling mortality of the camps lies at our doors (one of the saddest things I have ever seen in my life was a camp graveyard with its crowded tiny crosses; it looked like a nursery of

crosses); that the camps have created a fierce bitterness amongst the women and the young generation; that when every other memory of the war will have faded away the nightmare shadows of the camps will remain.

No one, I think, can fully understand MacDonald's reactions to the war of 1914 without remembering both that he had seen South Africa while the scars of war were raw across it, and the minds of men and women were still taut and twisted by their sufferings, and also that he had shared these unforgettable experiences with his wife. His chief purpose during the later war would be to ensure that the ultimate peace should be clement, conciliatory and lasting. This is the main theme of all he wrote upon South Africa also.

* * * * *

And now the Election of 1906 was approaching. The Liberal Party was in high hopes. The swing of the electoral pendulum, delayed by the "Khaki" Election of 1900, was overdue; their own war-time dissensions were over, while their opponents had now been hopelessly divided by Chamberlain's tariff campaign. The Labour Representation Committee had almost equally good grounds for optimism. And not merely because, still widely regarded as an appendage of the Liberal Party, it had a sort of residual interest in their fortunes. There were electoral trade-winds of its own. In 1901, in the celebrated Taff Vale decision, the House of Lords had held a union responsible—it had had to pay crushing damages—for offences committed by certain of its members during a strike. The trade union world was panic-stricken. All their hard-won privileges seemed threatened. The bulk of the Press was openly hostile. Public opinion was indifferent. Above all, in Parliament sat serried ranks of employers, inevitably hostile to

their claims. The pleas of the Labour Representation Committee, which had so far evoked only a moderate response, appeared suddenly in a new and seductive light. Trade unionists, who had regarded it, with hostility or indifference, as the embodiment of a suspect economic theory, found themselves beginning to look to it hopefully as an instrument for the defence of the corporate interests of labour. The numbers affiliated began to increase steadily. Labour candidates began to appear at by-elections, and though, until the war was over, they were inevitably unsuccessful, some encouraging surprises soon followed the peace. At Clitheroe, Philip Snowden had been proposed as an I.L.P. candidate, but MacDonald and the L.R.C. intervened and persuaded the I.L.P. to give way to their candidate, who would represent the united forces of Labour, political and industrial. Snowden, it is true, was a Socialist, while Shackleton, the nominee of the L.R.C., was a Liberal. What mattered, however, was that he was returned unopposed. Within a year, further victories had been won at Woolwich and Barnard Castle. Neither of the victors, Will Crooks and Arthur Henderson, were Socialists, but they were Labour and—this was what mattered—they had been returned. As for the fiscal controversy, it too assisted Labour, for, with the majority of the electorate at this time, the Labour leaders were believers in Free Trade. It was also, however, faintly embarrassing. It was necessary to explain to their audiences, for one thing, that Free Trade, though admirable, was not a cure for poverty, and that, though Chamberlain and his tariffs must be resisted, it was improper to combine with the Liberals to resist him. Moreover, it was difficult to deny that Socialism was far more closely akin to Protection than to Free Trade,

and that there was something paradoxical about simultaneously denouncing all state interference with imports and demanding as much state interference as possible with almost everything else. In a pamphlet, *The Zollverein and British Industry*, published in 1905, MacDonald courageously faced this paradox and attempted to resolve it.

Factory Laws, Fair Wages resolutions, Trade Unionism itself are contradictions of the economic creed based on the cheapest market policy. They are all Protection—not the Protection of Mr. Chaplin, the landlord, nor of Mr. Chamberlain, the demagogue, but the Protection of the Socialist, not the protection of tariffs, but the protection of the communal conscience and the communal wisdom imposing itself upon individual conduct.

This is hardly perhaps logically impeccable, but for the mass of the electorate it would be sufficient that the candidates of the L.R.C., even where they were Socialist, were free traders.

The shadow of the coming Election already fell across the Conference of 1905. The Committee was in high fettle. Its affiliated membership was 900,000—69,000 less than in the previous year, but then several small unions had withdrawn, owing to a change which had made contributions to the Parliamentary Fund compulsory. It already had four Members—Will Crooks, Keir Hardie, Arthur Henderson and Shackleton—and forty-two prospective candidates. It had begun to pay a maintenance grant of £200 a year to its Parliamentary Members. During the previous year it had sold 589,650 propaganda leaflets. It had, in fact, finally established itself as a not too clearly defined or logical, but an eminently practical, federation of trade unions and

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Socialist societies. Recurrent attempts to eject the Socialist bodies were finally and crushingly defeated at this very Conference, at which, to the complaint of one delegate, himself an active member of the I.L.P., that the Socialists wanted to return to Parliament not trade unionists but "Socialist millionaires, doctors and ministers," G. N. Barnes had replied that trade unionist and Socialist had "slightly different objects" but "a common cause," to which the Socialists had undoubtedly so far made the more effective contribution. Exactly how the "slightly different objects" were to be distinguished from the "common cause" Mr. Barnes did not explain. But an explanation would have been both difficult and superfluous. At the Conferences of 1900, 1901, 1903 and 1904 explicit resolutions had been moved to commit the membership to a Socialist objective. They had all been defeated. In 1905 there was another Socialist resolution. It appeared to rouse little interest and was passed without discussion. Apart from these five resolutions Socialism had scarcely figured at the Conferences at all. What did all this amount to? Perhaps it may be said that the one conspicuous object of the Committee was the creation of an effective Parliamentary Labour Party, and that this was the only object of which nine-tenths of its affiliated rank and file was as yet aware; but that most of its prominent and active members were Socialists, and there was now at least one successful Socialist resolution on its minute-book. For the Social Democratic Federation this was naturally highly inadequate. The Federation had withdrawn in 1901 (Hyndman would habitually refer to the "non-Socialist Labour Party"), and in 1905 consequently, instead of seven trade unionists and five Socialists, the executive contained three Socialists and ten trade unionists.

In fact, the political Labour movement had survived the perils of infancy. It was healthy, and likely to grow. To this fortunate state of affairs no one individual had contributed more than the Secretary. He had organised, tirelessly and ubiquitously. He had spoken all over the country. He had himself drafted many of the sixteen leaflets which had commanded so wide a sale, and had supervised the preparation of all of them. He had interviewed and corresponded, soothed and stimulated unflaggingly. The last business of the Conference of 1905 was a resolution, moved by two trade unionists and carried with acclamation.

That this Congress hereby places on record its hearty appreciation of the valuable services rendered to our movement by J. R. MacDonald, Secretary of the L.R.C., and assures him that the success of our educational work in the country is in no small measure due to the tireless energy he has displayed not merely in the general organising work in the several districts, but also in the literature issued dealing with the various social problems.

The Election, which came in 1906 and brought startling success to the Liberals, brought even more startling success to the Labour Representation Committee. The Committee put fifty candidates into the field; no less than twenty-nine were elected. MacDonald and Snowden had both reached Parliament for the first time. In addition to the twenty-nine, it must be remembered, there were twenty-four Labour Members, from organisations not yet affiliated to the L.R.C., a few openly Liberal-Labour, but most of them representatives of the miners' unions. It was clear that a new political force had arrived. The country became inquisitive overnight. "Everybody," said the triumphant Labour Executive, "is

asking: ‘What does it all mean? What does the Labour Party want? What will it do?’” To the world, the Labour successes appeared to be the sudden triumph of a new and untried principle, a view which, as was natural, the Labour victors themselves did nothing to discourage, and which has, somewhat less justifiably, been endorsed by most subsequent writers on the subject. Yet the later fortunes of the new Party can never be fully understood unless it is realised to how great an extent they owed their present success to the complaisance of the Liberals. The electoral pacts, which we have seen MacDonald advocating in the *Echo* as far back as 1901, were widely enforced. Of the twenty-nine Labour Members, only five had been elected against Liberal opposition. In the negotiations which led up to this fortunate result, it was Liberalism, ever apt to be apprehensively deferential to political forces on its Left, which made most of the concessions. Some while before the Election, it had been reported to Herbert Gladstone at Liberal headquarters that MacDonald was “immensely pleased” with the Liberal-Labour pact in his own constituency of Leicester, and that he was helping to promote similar arrangements elsewhere. Arthur Henderson, described as “in no way to be classed as anti-Liberal,” received the support of Liberal headquarters at Barnard Castle. Safe Liberal seats were cleared for Labour candidates, whom the Liberal Whips agreed in regarding as respectable, and potentially valuable, allies, rather than as the representatives of a new and challenging ideal. A good deal of the political strategy of the next eight years, during which the Labour leaders were charged at intervals by their more eager followers with treacherous subservience to Liberalism, can only be understood if it is remembered that most Labour

Members owed their seats to Liberal support. This of course it was difficult to explain to their critics. As one who was a member of the Labour Executive all through these years, has expressed it to me in a slightly different connection:

Uncle Arthur (Henderson) . . . did *not* say "Every one of us holds his seat only by consent of the Liberals, and it is very bad policy to annoy them unnecessarily." Everybody was aware of that fact, but it was not good form to speak of it.

On the morrow of the Election, in February 1906, after the sixth Annual Conference, at which the Labour Representation Committee at last officially transformed itself into the Labour Party, a Victory Demonstration was held at the Queen's Hall. It was the victory of "Labour" they were celebrating, and Henderson, who was in the chair, was the only speaker who suggested that the victory "marked an important epoch in the progress of Socialism." The general feeling was probably most nearly expressed by MacDonald, when he said:

Up to now the Labour Party has always been subordinate in politics. The cottage had had to fight for the palace, and the palace had always been neglecting to legislate in the interests of the cottage. The cottage the previous month said, "I am going to fight for myself and I am going to work and legislate for myself, because my experience has been that if I don't do it nobody else will do it for me."

What, in fine, *was* this new Party? It would probably be roughly accurate to estimate that at this time, of its rank and file, by which in the long run a Party's destiny is shaped, something like eighty-five per cent were loyal trade unionists, converts to no economic theory, who

desired simply a squarer deal from society, and thought their own men most likely to give it them. Perhaps a little over ten per cent were conscious converts to the evolutionary Socialism which taught that economic security for the wage-earner depended upon steadily increasing the area of state control; while considerably under five per cent would be Marxian devotees of the class war. The trade unionists would provide the votes, the evolutionary Socialists the idealism, energy and leadership, the Marxians little more than an occasional nuisance at meetings. Being *evolutionary* Socialists the leaders need not hesitate to combine with the Liberals. Being *evolutionary Socialists*, they still possessed that distinctive creed, that sense of being *different*, by which alone Parties live. But Collectivist doctrines had flourished in the Conservative Party in the 'seventies. Only the influx into it of wealthy industrialists, after Gladstone had divided the Liberals on Home Rule in '86, had temporarily submerged the cult. And the shock of finding Collectivism at the turn of the century transformed by Socialists, as, three-quarters of a century before, Individualism had been transformed by the middle classes, into the political philosophy of an insurgent class, had still further discredited it among Conservative controversialists—who were even prepared, during the first years of the century, to argue that a creed which had inspired a dozen great Conservative measures was the dream of a schoolboy or a fanatic. A few years, and Lloyd George's social insurance would be committing the Liberals also to Collectivism; a few more, and the war would be turning all Parties Collectivist despite themselves; while in the post-war years measure after measure of state interference would be placed on the statute book by Conservative Govern-

ments. What if evolutionary Socialism ceased one day to be a distinctive creed? But this dilemma lay beyond the horizon of 1906.

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MacDonald had been elected junior member for Leicester by 14,685 votes, as against the 14,745 of Broadhurst, the Liberal, and the 7,504 cast for the Conservative. The result reached some of the older Liberals in Lossiemouth late in the evening. They sent some of MacDonald's contemporaries to tell the news to his mother. She was in bed and asleep, and the messengers, finding her front door bolted, knocked at the back window. When at last she threw the sash up it took her some little while to take in the news. But she did not sleep again that night.

VI

P A R L I A M E N T A R I A N

1906-1909

BEING elected to Parliament meant beginning a new life. Long before, a great Parliamentarian had observed that the first condition of success in Parliament was to be there. And MacDonald was even more conscientious than Disraeli. He too was always in his place. Fresh inroads were thus made upon his home life. There were solitary evenings for his wife—"a desert of a home, without children and generally without a husband," as she once put it—and weeks when he scarcely saw his children. And, with the master of the house so often from home, the Lincoln's Inn Fields' At Homes died away. Home life became more precious as the world encroached on it. On the rare evenings when they could be alone together, she would sit sewing in the narrow pool of light from a reading lamp, while he read aloud some book whose theme was remote from politics, and the rest of the room lay shadowed and silent. Thackeray and Dickens and Scott they read, and Addington Symonds' *Renaissance*, and Ruskin and Carlyle. And for Sundays, at her wish, there were specially chosen books. In the spring of 1905, as a sort of refuge from public life, they had acquired a country cottage, "Linfield," Chesham Bois, "in the centre of innumerable field-paths and by-ways amongst the Chilterns." Here they could indulge their joint passion for walking, from Northwood to Aylesbury, from the Thames to the hills beyond Tring,

in a countryside rich in history, and haunted by the shades of Cromwell and Milton, Hampden, Penn and Burke. All through his life, even when to the public he was little more than a blind foe to all tradition, MacDonald possessed what can only be called a passionate reverence for the past. What indeed could be more natural in one with his hereditary feeling for romance, and his vision of all history as organic growth? When, as Prime Minister, in 1924, he went to stay at Bishopthorpe, York, what first struck the present Archbishop of Canterbury, his host, was his extraordinary veneration for the age and beauty of the city. "This is what I want the Labour Party to build on," he said. "When I come into an ancient building like the Minster, and try to take in the spirit of it, I feel that I ought to take the shoes from off my feet, for I am on holy ground." The Archbishop put a question to him "as a good Socialist." "Ought I to live in a house like this? There is history, beauty, character, meaning here. I can't go to live in a slum; that would prevent me from doing my job. The only alternative would be to take a substantial villa outside the town and identify myself with the bourgeoisie. But what good would be done by that?" "You are right," said MacDonald. "You are right. This is worth preserving. You should live here." This sense of the past was no belated by-product, as some of his detractors would have liked to think, of his days of power. Born with him in Lossiemouth, and nurtured on Scottish romance, it was no less keen in the presence of the past of England. At Chesham Bois they evolved a miniature tour for their visitors, which should display the pages of national history written in their neighbourhood—Stoke Poges and the churchyard of Gray's *Elegy*, Chalfont St. Giles and Milton's cottage, Jordans with its Quaker memories,



Malcolm and Ishbel with their father, 1907.

"where God meets one face to face more directly than in any cathedral in the land," Beaconsfield (where for them the attraction was not Disraeli), and so home by way of Great Hampden Church, where the Puritan soldiers brought the body of John Hampden "and she liked me to say the first verses of the psalms they sang coming and going."

By 1906 they had six children. They were brought up on a courageously Spartan regime. The parents were determined not "to smother" their children with attentions. They believed that they had seen in other households that "the result of leading-strings and culture under glass was a feeble manhood and a silly womanhood." Their children should be brought up to stand on their own feet, to trust themselves. They must learn to do without their parents. And so when, at the age of five, Malcolm went to his first school, half across London, he was taken to the appropriate bus; but the rest of the journey there, and all the journey home, then and henceforth, he must make alone. Alister, at eight, was considered competent to convey himself, unaided, to Blackheath. And during their parents' frequent travels abroad, their family would be sent to the homes of willing friends or relations. Despite all distractions, interruptions and preoccupations, however, there can be no doubt that the MacDonalds mysteriously contrived to remain singularly attentive and affectionate parents. The most significant tribute to MacDonald as a father was the quite exceptional loyalty and affection of his children—most of whom spent their school days while he was the best hated individual in Great Britain. One of them writes:

. . . his chief times with them when they were young, up

to the outbreak of the war in 1914, were such parts of the week-ends as he could snatch away from meetings, when the family all went to their cottage at Chesham Bois. The cottage was bought no doubt partly to provide opportunities for quiet family life which were lacking in London. In London itself, apart from breakfast time, occasions for meeting his children were all too rare, and were confined to such events as their visits, long looked forward to by them, to eat strawberries and cream on the Terrace of the House of Commons.

But at week-ends and on holidays he was as much as possible with them. For instance, at these times he read aloud a great deal to them. . . . Usually the youngest sat on his knee whilst the others sprawled around the room. He read fiction, with a Scottish bias. By these daily readings the children became acquainted with the best of Scott's and Stevenson's stories. . . . Novels were sometimes interchanged with poetry. Such long poems as *Marmion* were read through, as were also the Ballads and much else. Discipline entered into these readings. Whilst *Treasure Island* was being read, for example, the ration was one chapter an evening . . . and however beseeching the cry of the eager audience, it was on no occasion exceeded. On Sundays a special book was read, not the Bible itself, but usually some simple account of Bible history and Bible stories. But even when the children were quite young, the reading was not confined to fiction and simple, straightforward verse. J. R. M. read a good deal about science and nature to them. Not only did he read animal stories, such as those by Seton Thompson. He also read books, written of course for children, explaining the elements of chemistry, physics and biology: such as *The Fairyland of Science*. He also had a small library of such children's books as *By the Pond*, *In the River*, and so on. . . . Such reading to his children . . . continued right through the war and after the war, until his accession to office as Prime Minister made it physically impossible for time to be found for it.

Besides reading, his second great activity was walking. This too, as far as his work and engagements permitted, was

a regular feature of his life with them. At week-ends in Buckinghamshire there would be a walk, sometimes of very great length. None of the children ever had a bicycle. They were taught to use their own legs for getting from one place to another. If the walks were long, they were made to seem short by the stories which he told as they proceeded. Another of his devices was to play games such as "I Spy," so as to distract his companions' attention from their own tiredness. Very often also the day's reading would, so to speak, spill over into the walk. He would ask searching questions about the elementary problems of chemistry or physics which had perhaps been contained in a chapter read earlier in the day. The questions would be asked of each walker in turn, so that the walk resolved itself, for a while at any rate, into a class. It became exceedingly embarrassing for any one who could not answer a question! . . .

He made an almost annual expedition to Cairn Gorm in August. The weather there is uncertain, and the odds are that one will have a very unpleasant time during the night on the mountainside. . . . But year after year he fulfilled the expedition with his children. On the first day Cairn Gorm was climbed, the night was spent on heather top under the celebrated Shelter Stone, and the next day we spent in climbing over the top of Ben Muichdui. He was accustomed to taking risks. The more timid of his friends used to think him mad to take his children on these expeditions, when they would probably get soaked by the rain and dried by the wind two or three times a day, with the probability of having to sleep in the greatest discomfort amongst the rocks on beds of half-dried heather. But he believed in that kind of adventure for them, when every reasonable precaution had been taken. He did not mind their sitting in drawing-rooms when the weather was stormy outside. On at least one occasion the party at Cairn Gorm was in serious danger of being lost, perhaps for ever, on the mountain tops. He himself has told the *Wanderings and Excursions*. Despite this unpleasant experience, the whole party returned under his leadership to Cairn Gorm next year.

In Lossiemouth he always took his sons when they were young to bathe in the sea before breakfast. One morning one of them got into a hole amongst the rocks and was almost drowned. This made no difference to the practice. He took the boys bathing before breakfast again next morning. . . .

He has always been a disciplinarian. So far as his children were concerned, he believed in the maxim, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." But in his case it was not a rod, but his slipper which was usually the instrument of punishment. But despite this close association with his children's lives and interests, he was anxious that parental authority should not intrude too much. His work necessitated his being away from them during many holidays, and he used this in order to increase in them their sense of independence. They would be sent off to stay with friends or relatives, sometimes travelling one or two of them alone in the Guard's van. . . .

* * * * *

Election to Parliament meant also the beginning of thirty years of gruelling intimacy with the complex Parliamentary machine, if machine is the word for so essentially human an affair. Slow, cumbersome, often infuriating—"one got tired," MacDonald wrote, "just in making the machine move at all"—it remained indubitably potent, and over MacDonald, as over almost all those who have toiled for it, it exercised a lifelong spell. And to the difficulties of "just making the machine move at all" were added the difficulties of belonging to a new, untried and far from homogeneous Parliamentary group—for which, being both a member of it and Secretary of the Party as a whole, he felt himself in a special sense responsible to the rank and file. The words he wrote of his wife after her death were undoubtedly drawn from his own experience at this time:

. . . She was appalled when she discovered how easy it was

to undo what had been built up by years of patient toiling, and how the most absurd revolts found passionate followers. She used to say that she never understood Moses and the Children of Israel until 1906.

Of the twenty-nine of the official Labour group in Parliament only six were nonnionees of the Independent Labour Party. And though, by the austere standards of the Social Democratic Federation, even these six were not Socialists but Social Reformers, they did at least wear the Socialist label and profess the Socialist creed. And the majority were by no means unsuspicious of their six Socialist colleagues; particularly of those who, in addition to being Socialists, were not even trade unionists. Thus, while Hyndman and his handful of class-warriors were certain that MacDonald was a timid and treacherous moderate, the trade-unionists were at present more inclined to suspect him of being a dangerous ideologue. Moreover, it lay in the nature of the Parliamentary situation that the Labour Party should be constantly supporting the Liberal Government, yet when it was MacDonald who was responsible, in whole or in part, for such tactics, the suspicions of both types of critics were apt to stir—of the Social Democrats because MacDonald, like the Liberals, was scarcely, in their sense, a Socialist (“a dangerous enemy to Socialism” Hyndman called him): of the trade unionists because, like Liberalism, he was scarcely, in their sense, of the working-class. In 1906 Keir Hardie appeared to both wings to be a more accommodating figure. For, although he had repudiated the class-war as unequivocally, if not so often, or on such explicit and scientific grounds, as MacDonald, his platform speeches seldom lacked a sprinkling of the more revolutionary phrases from the New Testament, and, though he was no longer a trade

unionist, there could be no two opinions about his belonging to the working-class; indeed from the day in 1892 when he had arrived at the House for the first time in a working man's cloth cap, accompanied by a brass band in a wagonette, he had remained rigidly, even aggressively, the working man in Parliament. In 1906 he was the only Socialist whom the non-Socialist majority of the Parliamentary group could be expected even to consider as chairman. He possessed, it is true, few Parliamentary gifts, and in Parliament was chiefly significant as a sort of national symbol of insurgent Labour. But he had been elected earlier than any of them, and the political birth of Labour in 1900 had been due to him more than to any other one person. Indeed, in that war-time trough of all advanced causes, the trade unions had countenanced the event largely through mere impatience with Hardie's protracted importunities. Even so, the fact remained that he wore the Socialist label, with which the trade unionist majority had as yet no inclination to identify itself. His election as first Chairman of the Parliamentary Party was far from a foregone conclusion, and in the event it was carried by the narrowest margin possible. Shackleton, an energetic and competent non-Socialist trade unionist, was proposed as an alternative. I am told, by one who was present, that the first vote, by show of hands, resulted in a tie. MacDonald had not voted. "MacDonald, you must vote," they said. The next vote was by ballot, but again the voting was equal. "MacDonald you *must* vote this time." At the next trial Hardie was elected by one vote. Afterwards he privately told my informant that MacDonald must have voted for Shackleton, for at the last ballot he, Hardie, had, for the first time, voted for himself. If this was so, the episode is quite characteristic

of MacDonald. It was both wise and proper for the Secretary of the National Party to display no public preferences as to the Parliamentary Chairman, with whom he would have to collaborate so closely. And when he was compelled to choose, his choice, though doubtless reluctant, was eminently realistic. For, though Hardie was an old colleague, a Socialist and a symbol, Shackleton was at least something of a Parliamentarian.

The team, which somebody had to lead, was a new, but hardly an explosive, force. There is a photograph of the twenty-nine, taken on the terrace of the House in 1906. They look less like a set of revolutionary malcontents, than an excursion of nonconformist lay-preachers. Nor was the group over-burdened with Parliamentary ability. The trade union Members, mostly with long careers in trade union officialdom behind them, seldom possessed the suppleness of intelligence or the intellectual training to adapt themselves readily to Parliament. They were apt, moreover, to be distracted by the claims of their unions on their time. In the House, where, for the most part, they spoke little and spent much time in the smoking-room, they seemed to many to represent little more than what Hyndman bitterly described as "a dull and deferential respectability." Looking back on these early years—apart of course from MacDonald himself, and apart from Mr. Barnes, a Coalition Cabinet Minister during the war, and Mr., later Sir David, Shackleton, both of whom were effective, common-sense debaters—one discerns only three outstanding names; Hardie, Henderson and Snowden. Of these three curiously dissimilar men, whose careers were so closely intertwined with MacDonald's, only Snowden owed his reputation to Parliament.

Keir Hardie was at once the prophet and the symbol of the early Labour movement, and, as such, he will long be revered in countless working-class homes. He had preached his Labour gospel with tireless devotion all over the country, but he had neither the quickness of wit, nor the inclination, for Parliamentary manœuvre. Moreover, temperamentally, like many idealists, he was an individualist, accustomed to follow his own intuitions and apt, in Parliament, to take his own line, irrespective of his colleagues. Unwaveringly clear as to the end, he was often indifferent to the indispensable means. To MacDonald, constantly preoccupied with both means and end, a Parliamentarian to his finger-tips, and inevitably bearing a disproportionate share of responsibility for the tactics of the group, Hardie's combination of idealism and individualism was often profoundly exasperating. Those few of his friends to whom now and again he confided his impatience were apt to ascribe the blame for the occasional misunderstandings to MacDonald—unless, indeed, they were in Parliament themselves. The two men had a high regard for each other. MacDonald's tribute to Hardie in his preface to Stewart's *Life* is one of the most moving things he ever wrote. But, in Parliament at least, they were not fitted to work together without friction. In Parliament Hardie could only be a free-lance, and MacDonald was not fond of free-lances.

Like Hardie, though for very different reasons, Arthur Henderson also was not primarily a Parliament man. He would only come into his own when, in 1911, he succeeded MacDonald as Secretary of the Party. He had started political life as a Liberal agent, and in a sense he was never anything else. He was the consummate Party organiser. He had not yet assumed the

Socialist label, and when circumstances had transformed him from solid Liberal agent into solid Labour candidate, so far from undergoing a startling conversion there is no evidence that he was ruffled by the slightest spiritual or intellectual change. And though he had shared, and felt for, the hardships of his class, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that spiritually he belonged always to the bourgeoisie. He had all the strength, and something of the weakness, of that largely fictitious class; respectable, cautious, God-fearing, kind, industrious, magnificently destitute of æsthetic and intellectual tastes, and—astute. Physically as well as mentally, this solid, friendly, uninspiring figure was almost the exact counterpart of the shy, intellectual, highly-strung, strikingly handsome MacDonald. The two men were never intimate, but each respected the other's qualities. Quite early indeed Henderson seems to have made up his mind that MacDonald was the destined leader. And as time went on, they collaborated closely and effectively. This was to the credit of both, since MacDonald, though not touchy, was sensitive, and Henderson, though not sensitive, was touchy.

Apart from MacDonald, only Philip Snowden was to achieve a first-class Parliamentary reputation. Like MacDonald, this keen-witted, iron-willed, incorruptible Yorkshireman had won his spurs on the platforms of the I.L.P. Through the granite from which his character was hewn ran a curious vein of bitterness. The early Labour Party was an exception to the general rule, that Parties of the Left are apt to serve as a focus for the malcontent and the maladjusted, and perhaps Snowden, crippled for life in a bicycle-accident when a young man, was the only member of it conscious of a personal grievance against fate. Despite a rugged kindness of

nature, he was, in public life at any rate, a bitter man. He did not spare his political enemies, and at the end of his long career, there were few, even of his political friends, whom he had not, at one time or another, publicly traduced. No one was more continuously associated with MacDonald—in the crises of 1914 and 1931 they were in agreement, against the majority of their colleagues—yet MacDonald's most inveterate enemy scarcely spoke of him with more vitriolic hostility than could Snowden on occasion. This bitterness, which must have been exaggerated, if not occasioned, by the physical pain which he constantly suffered, often seemed unpremeditated and almost involuntary. I have been told by one who was present, that on one occasion, when the Parliamentary group was about to re-elect MacDonald as its Chairman—the election was a foregone conclusion and there were no rival candidates—Snowden unexpectedly delivered a bitter tirade against MacDonald's chairmanship. When he had finished, he was asked whom, then, he wished to propose. He replied that he proposed nobody.

* * * * *

As the first session of the new Parliament opened, MacDonald was confidently optimistic. He was convinced that Labour's successes had not been due to any transient particular grievance of trade unionists; indeed an article, which he contributed at this time to the *Independent Review*, shows that he was inclined to underestimate the electoral importance of the Taff Vale decision. He saw a whole succession of Socialist reforms ahead, some to be extracted from the Liberal Government, others awaiting an eventual Labour administration. This programme, he was prepared to argue, was so

firmly rooted in the instinctive sense of justice that it could scarcely be labelled as primarily Socialist, or even working-class.

These conclusions are reached, not by a process of economic reasoning or of working-class experience. They rest upon conceptions of right and wrong common to all classes; and the greatest work of all that the Labour Party has to do is to compel those conceptions of right and wrong to pass judgment upon existing social conditions.

This is perhaps but another way of putting the dominating, but little recognised, truth that Collectivist principles, like Individualism in the previous era, were becoming all-pervasive, increasingly the common property of all Parties and all classes. Alter "working-class" to "middle-class," and "Labour" to "Liberal," and MacDonald's words might have been used by a Benthamite Individualist in the eighteen twenties. MacDonald and Snowden, in other words, did not so much want to move in a different direction to the other Parties, as to move faster and further in the same direction. Despite the current controversy over gas and water Socialism, which had been revived by the Labour successes, by 1906 all Parties were bound to advance towards an increase of public enterprise. Lloyd George's state insurances, the Public Corporations of the Conservative Party already lay in the logic of history; or, as MacDonald would have put it, the organic growth of society was making them inevitable. And though its comprehensiveness was likely to alarm contemporaries, the Socialist formula framed by MacDonald at this time, in his *Socialism* (1907), in fact envisaged a process, different no doubt in temper and degree, but hardly different in kind, from these enactments.

The Socialist believes that so long as private property in things essential to human well-being is recognised, so long will property dominate life. An essential feature of the Socialist State will, therefore, be the common ownership of all those forms of property in the use or abuse of which the whole community is more interested than private individuals, and the employment of such property for common ends and not for private profit.

Indeed, for MacDonald and his friends, perhaps the principal tactical problem of these years was that Mr. Lloyd George's avowed determination, that the Liberal Government should outbid the Labour Party for the support of the masses, inevitably resulted in Collectivist legislation. For Labour to resist such measures would have been self-stultification; while constantly to support the Liberals was to expose itself to the charge of half-hearted moderation.

* * * * * *

The new Parliament met on February 13th. On February 21st MacDonald asked a Question, and again on the 27th. He made his maiden speech on March 5th.¹ There were no fireworks, no general principles. A motion to reduce the Civil Service Estimates by £100 was under discussion. He began by demanding a by-law prohibiting street-trading by children after school hours. Thence he passed to an attack on the syllabus of the examination for factory inspectors—English literature and history and a modern language—after passing which they were likely still to know nothing whatever about machines. He suspected that this meant carmarking inspectorships for a privileged University class. And he went on to an

¹ Curiously enough, in his *Autobiography*, Lord Snowden says that MacDonald's maiden speech (some weeks after the session had begun) dealt with wages in the Government Arsenal—actually this was delivered on March 8th—while Mr. Hessel Tiltman, in his *James Ramsay MacDonald* (1929), says that the maiden speech was delivered in July, on unemployment and farm colonies. Even the Labour Party's Annual Report is nearly a month out in the date of the actual speech.

entertaining attack upon the whole theory of a general education, which is the basis of the Oxford system. The claims of the Oxford system are probably, it must be admitted, at their weakest in the education of a factory inspector: but no loyal Oxonian will admit that a general education is bad for administrators, nor indeed would MacDonald have maintained it, I think, in his later years, when he had seen more of administration.

This purely academical and theoretical university and collegiate syllabus was putting a premium upon book learning, and making it impossible for a man with a practical knowledge of factory theory to compete with young men just leaving Oxford and Cambridge. He might say that when he was in Johannesburg he met almost the whole of Balliol University (*sic*), and the only justification given him was that under circumstances such as existed there, the administrators were said to require a very general knowledge and a general education. Every single one of those gentlemen had been an absolute failure (*Cries of "No, no!"*) Perhaps there was one exception, but with one exception the whole of the Balliol kindergarten in South Africa had been a failure. The Right Hon. Gentleman was proceeding on precisely the same lines as those responsible for the Transvaal acted upon immediately after the war, and he ventured to prophesy that if the experiment was conducted for three or four years the same disastrous results would have to be recorded at the Factory Department of the Home Office. These men when appointed were handed over to subordinates, and the time of the subordinates was taken up looking after them. These very men, who had not the opportunity of becoming full inspectors, had to coach the men who were appointed to the full inspectorships. . . . Decent employees of labour should make a strong protest against this attempt to use the factories as schools for university men who received appointments as inspectors. There never was a happier hunting ground provided by the ratepayers for people who were able to send their sons to be educated:

Oxford, and whose idea of respectable occupation was that they should turn their attention to the Civil Service. . . . He and his hon. friends of the Labour Party held that capital should not be unnecessarily harried by untried men of no experience, amateurs who had merely passed literary examinations; they held also that workmen should not be exposed to the dangers of their calling by the imperfect knowledge of inspectors.

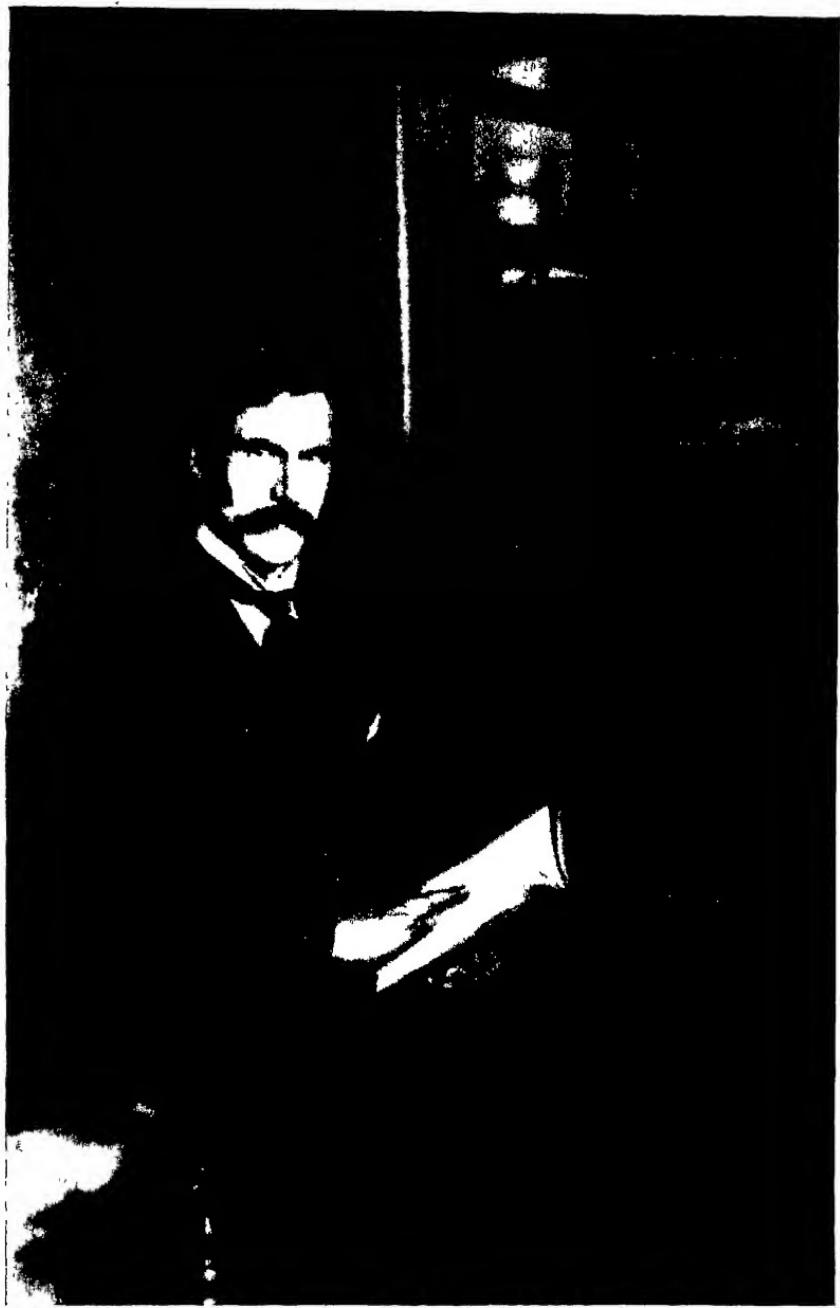
An unspectacular performance—as the speaker fully intended. It was the first business of the Labour Party, he was convinced, to show that from its own individual standpoint it could contribute intelligent criticism to the humdrum discussion of everyday affairs. It would have been possible of course to make this, and most other occasions, an opportunity for a challenging discourse on Socialist first principles; but in fact MacDonald, and for that matter his four Socialist colleagues, at this time rarely introduced the word Socialism into Parliamentary debate. Nothing was to be gained by being provocative, particularly as no one was likely to be sooner antagonised by excessive emphasis on Socialist doctrines than the majority of his own Party. Enough for the present if Labour Members could succeed in distinguishing themselves from the Liberals, as at any rate a Labour Party. And inevitably Labour arguments, even though not so labelled, were frequently Socialist in character, so that the Annual Report of the I.L.P. could claim that “Socialist Members of the Labour Party are as free to expound Socialism . . . as they would be were there no Labour Party,” and could add, with pardonable hyperbole, “not only are they free to do so, but they take full advantage of every occasion for doing so, as . . . Hansard’s Reports of the Parliamentary Debates prove beyond question.”

From now on, MacDonald was constantly active in debate—he spoke briefly later on the very day of his maiden speech, on the right of asylum for political refugees. In a Parliamentary group of thirty, many of whose members were almost exclusively interested in trade union affairs, a disproportionate share of speaking necessarily fell to the few who possessed wider interests and information. And it gradually became apparent to the House that in MacDonald a new and unexpected variety of Labour Member had appeared. Despite their consistently practical bias, his speeches were profoundly reflective. It was not so much that he pursued a metaphysical vein, though this he occasionally did, as that even when he was dealing, as he usually did deal, with the most concrete particulars, what he had to say was unmistakably rooted in a deeply pondered and coherent philosophy of life. His speaking seemed to exercise a special fascination over Arthur Balfour, the philosopher-politician *par excellence*, who, when MacDonald was up, would frequently shift down the front bench to a point opposite the speaker, from which he would regard him with a curious intensity. Years afterwards, Lord Balfour observed a drawing of MacDonald in the studio of Sir William Rothenstein. "A born Parliamentarian," he observed, with a smile. Indeed, though in heredity, experience and sympathies the two stood poles apart, there was perhaps an obscure psychological bond between the subtle, lackadaisical, Conservative philosopher-aristocrat, and the fervent Puritan insurgent from the Scottish cottage. Both, it may be, were thinkers before they were politicians, and through the utterances of both, as will sometimes happen when, by prolonged meditation, a complex nature has evolved its own philosophy of life, there

would sometimes run a vein of obscurity or paradox which, to their enemies at any rate, was apt to appear disingenuous or perverse. Some, for example, may have felt that there was something tortuous about MacDonald's defence, when he spoke on the Education Bill in April and May of this first session, of the so-called secularist solution. Yet his views were both sincere and deeply felt. He objected to the teaching of religion because he believed that it led to irreligion; he wanted the Bible excluded from the schools because he respected the Bible. He supported the secular solution, in fact, because he was not a Secularist. Sectarian teaching, he said, was one of the principal reasons for the decay of "real, genuine spiritual religion."

I oppose it not because I am a secularist, because I am not, and not because I am a Roman Catholic or High Churchman but because I feel the very greatest sorrow and grief when I find that religion is becoming so much a formal affair, so much a thing of the lips, so much a thing of mere outward conduct, and so little of the real spirit.

The Bible, he said in a later debate, "is used as a text-book for the purpose of telling some story or other to children in precisely the same way that the geography or arithmetic book is used." Better not to use the Bible at all! Both parties to the ancient controversy might quite conceivably resent this attitude as a disingenuous attempt to make the best of both worlds. Yet it was in fact a perfectly genuine individual view, much pondered and long held. And the essentially religious temper of his mind was always discernible. In a speech, which was praised by both Churchmen and Conservatives, on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill (June 16, 1913), he said:



JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD
A photograph taken about 1907.

My view of the Established Church is that its connection with the State gives it a secular bias. I was born in the atmosphere of a phrase which has never left me and which, I believe, never will. In the great controversy which led to the disruption of the Church of Scotland a minister said all our hopes, the teaching that moulded us and gave us our convictions—and prejudices if you like—centred round this magnificent expression, “the only head of the Church is Christ.”

He spoke and questioned on a wide variety of domestic issues (Parliament seldom then interested itself in foreign affairs), with occasional excursions into colonial matters. In the July of his first session he moved for leave to introduce an Unemployed Workmen Bill. In the light of later controversy, it is interesting to note that it proposed a register of the unemployed, and the preparation by Local Authorities of schemes for public works, co-ordinated by Commissioners, who might also become responsible for the works themselves. The cost of the scheme was to fall upon the rates, save in times of exceptional distress, when it might become a national charge. It is interesting too to observe that, in MacDonald's words,

the Bill provided that the habitual shirker should be compelled to perform reasonable work under the unemployed authority. He hoped it would not again be said that the Labour Party had any sympathy with the loafer and shirker of work, who tried to batten and fatten on the public funds.

Such words have hardly been heard in Parliament since 1918.

It was a successful first session for the new Party. The Government's Trade Disputes Bill, introduced to obliterate the effects of the Taff Vale decision, was radically altered to meet Labour views, and Members

of the group introduced motions on Old Age Pensions and various trade union matters, as well as a Private Member's Provision of Meals for Children Bill. Already there were complaints from a minority of the rank and file that the Labour Members spent most of their time supporting Liberalism, but on the whole the new men felt that they had achieved some solid results, and it was obvious that the country was interested in them. During the next three sessions it was much the same story; general support for the Government, sound work in Committee, and a few private Bills and Motions—trade-unionist these, rather than Socialist. At the beginning of the session the Party would agree upon a number of subjects for Private Members' Bills and Motions, to be moved if the fortune of the Ballot permitted. The Bills would deal with Labour subjects, but among the Motions there would be Socialist proposals too—for the nationalisation of Land, Mines and Railways. When, however, chance allowed one to be moved, it would be a Labour motion—on Factory Inspection or the Eight Hours Day—which was selected.

MacDonald was undeniably the outstanding member of the group. He possessed also those two prerequisites of success, a shrewd grasp of Parliamentary tactics and that mysterious personal distinction which commands attention. It was not only his handsome appearance or his magnificent voice. It was not only that he had become a persuasive and lucid debater, nor even that everything he said was stamped clear with individuality. When all the qualities in MacDonald have been labelled and assessed, there remains always an indefinable residue; a mysterious hinterland, a secret reserve of strength. Before the end of that first Parliament, he was widely recognised as a figure both challenging and formidable.

P A R L I A M E N T A R I A N

To *J. Bruce Glasier.*

Undated.

DEAR GLASIER,

I have not seen Rose¹ to-day but I wanted to tell him not to miss the most important point in Friday's debate, viz. that Burns was afraid of making his speech before I wound up. Asquith did that last year and was followed by Henderson. That is the etiquette and practise of the House. Burns funked and told us that he insisted upon speaking last. Rub that in.

The old order changeth. Let it be so. They will get no better. A thousand pities, a thousand thanks, a thousand good wishes.

Yours ever,

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD

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None the less, despite the solid industry of the Party as a whole, and the distinction of occasional individual performances, there could be no doubt that its prospects were not brightening as the sessions of that first Parliament drew by. For the country the exciting novelty of the spectacle of Labour in Parliament had begun to wear off.

Moreover, not only did the Labour men necessarily find themselves constantly supporting the Liberal Government; the Liberal Government, unfortunately, was not getting very much done. The Lords had begun to destroy its measures. Under these circumstances, a certain sense of frustration within the new Party became inevitable. The rank and file had made great sacrifices to return its thirty Members to Parliament, and its hopes of them had been correspondingly high; yet for the rank and file at any rate, it was not always easy to see what tangible results were being achieved by their presence there. It was soon necessary to be constantly reminding them that

¹ Frank Rose, Parliamentary Reporter for the *Labour Leader*.

the value of a Party in the House of Commons cannot be measured merely by the big Bills it has introduced, amended and helped to pass. That might be called its shop-window work. By putting questions, by working on Committees, by interviewing Ministers, by moving resolutions, the Party manages to keep a certain group of interests before the attention of Parliament. By its independent attitude it prevents the neglect of interests which the other Parties do not find it convenient to attend to.

The words are those of the official Report, after two years of the new Parliament, and they were substantiated by a published list of every Bill and motion moved, indeed of every Question put, by Labour Members. The logic of the defence was undeniable, and with their customary good sense the rank and file accepted it at their annual Conferences by large majorities. The fact remained that they had expected something more spectacular. That the Parliamentary machine itself made the spectacular impossible it was not easy for them to understand. It was puzzling, too, to the enthusiastic partisan of Labour to find that the general public, which had greeted the appearance of the new Party in 1906 with a thrill of genuine excitement or apprehension, was apparently now chiefly interested in the fact that its Members did not wear top hats. Were their men really, as the malcontent minority alleged, little better than Liberals? There were other ways, of course, of distinguishing oneself from a Liberal than by wearing a bowler hat, or voting against the often admirable Liberal measures—best of all, to make speeches which, even if they contained no Marxian shibboleths, were manifestly not the fruit of any Liberal philosophy. This MacDonald was pre-eminently qualified to do.

P A R L I A M E N T A R I A N

To Alexander Mackintosh, Esq.¹

20th December, 1907.

. . . I have had a very hard time of it since I saw you, and have suffered somewhat by unfair reports. Will you let me thank you for what you have been writing about me? The position is a very simple one. Our men in the country have been rather spoiled by extreme statements, and it is necessary to make it perfectly clear to them that the Labour Party is not the Liberal Party in order to keep the movement together. That is all I have been doing. At the same time, I have been stating that much of the Liberal legislation has been excellent. Those parts of my speeches, however, have not been reported. . . .

But in some ways the most exacting, and, in the long retrospect of history, certainly the most important, task of the leaders was to lead. Even in the Labour Party, with its huge non-Socialist majority, impatience was endemic and would flare up at each Annual Conference. In 1908 Ben Tillett, hero of the Dock Strike of 1887, published an explosive pamphlet, *Is the Parliamentary Labour Party a Failure?* of which Henderson complained to the Labour Conference of 1909 that Snowden, Shackleton and himself were described as "sheer hypocrites," "liars at five and ten guineas a time," "cruel hoaxers," "softly feline in their purring to Ministers and their patronage," " betrayers of the class that willingly supports them" and "Press flunkies to Asquith." On this and many similar occasions it was necessary for the platform, while discreetly careful not to quench the ardour of the militants, to bring the delegates back to realities by reminding them of the limitations of the Parliamentary machine, the susceptibilities of the electorate and the gulf which sunder phrase-making from action. And always, in the Labour

¹ Afterwards Sir Alexander Mackintosh, Chairman of the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

Conferences, the majority responded. The phraseologists, as MacDonald called them, never had their way. Indeed the yearly tussle between responsibles and irresponsibles became a prolonged process of democratic education, out of which grew the Labour Party, as the rising generation was to know it, steady, realistic and *British*. Here, rather than in Parliament, the insurgent forces of the future were taking shape. The men who steered the rank and file of the adolescent Party through the internal stresses of these formative years were moulding history as neither they nor their contemporaries could yet guess. MacDonald was of course conspicuous, but not among the one or two most conspicuous, on the Labour Conference platforms of these first years; for he was still Secretary of the Party, and as such, though, behind the scenes, its organisation and much of its strategy was in his hands, he did not think it proper to play so prominent a part as the other members of the Executive. On his shoulders, however, rested an even more crucial responsibility, the guidance of the I.L.P. Here, in the Socialist spearhead—"the Praetorian Guard" MacDonald called it—of the Labour Movement, far smaller yet far more aware than its powerful, but less single-hearted, ally, were concentrated the devotees, the idealists and the ideologues. From this band of self-consecrated missionaries would proceed the political impetus of the Labour movement. Here, if anywhere, lurked the danger that the British Labour Party might continentalise itself and move with increasing momentum down the primrose path to irresponsibility, faction and ultimate extinction. To steer the Labour Party through these early years was arduous and responsible enough; to steer the Independent Labour Party was trebly arduous and trebly responsible. And of this

formidable burden a wholly disproportionate share rested on the shoulders of MacDonald. Chairman from 1906 to 1909, he was, throughout these years, a dominating influence. Already he was recognised, as Keir Hardie told the Conference of 1909, as "the biggest intellectual asset which the Socialist movement had in this country to-day." It was his difficult business, he saw, to keep steadily dominant, in a Society which teemed with enthusiastic impossibilists, his own ingrained moderation, his own characteristic view that "Socialism" (as he put it to them in 1908) "was not their idea, but the idea of nature herself. It was the imperative necessity of its own evolution imposed on society from the beginning." Nowhere, perhaps, is there a more luminous example of this deep-rooted wisdom and restraint, nowhere a more fully typical expression of his political faith, than in his farewell address, as Chairman, to the I.L.P. Conference of April, 1909. Through every section of the Labour movement the impatience of the extremer minority was ebullient. At the Labour Conference of January there had been hard words and frayed tempers over Tillett's "pea-green pamphlet." Inevitably, in the I.L.P. the storms would be more formidable. Moreover just then the I.L.P. had its own peculiar dissensions. In the summer of 1907, Victor Grayson, a young Unitarian and Socialist from Owens College, Manchester, who had become mob-leader of the local unemployed, was elected, to the astonishment of the whole country, at a by-election in the Colne Valley of Yorkshire. Though he was a member of the I.L.P., both the Labour Party and the I.L.P. had declined to endorse his candidature, partly because the prospects of the election were reported as hopeless, partly because older members of the Party were considered to have a better claim to the seat. Grayson's

head seems to have been turned by his unexpected success. He behaved as if he were too pure a Red to associate with the Labour Party, and spent less time in Parliament than in attacking his colleagues on provincial platforms. He had a considerable power of popular oratory, and soon became the favourite of the Socialist malcontents. His election, without official endorsement, as a Socialist Independent had already given him his cue as a rebel. Grayson "incidents" began to accumulate. In the name of the unemployed, he engineered a theatrical "scene" in Parliament, where he had taken no part in his colleagues' less flamboyant efforts on their behalf. To MacDonald of course "scenes" were anathema. Not only did his sense of dignity revolt; he resented them as a blow at the authority of Parliament itself. Ten years before he entered Parliament, he had bought and read a second-hand volume of Parliamentary Reminiscences, published in 1834. Deep and, one suspects, resentful scores in the margin mark the passages which deal with disturbances in Parliament.

Soon afterwards, Grayson rose to continue a six-hours' debate on the prospective visit of King Edward to the Tsar, at the very moment when Henderson, as Chairman of the Labour Party, was compelled, in loyalty to an agreed time-schedule, to move the closure on him. Finally, he refused to appear at Holborn on the same platform as Keir Hardie. All these incidents, which Grayson's supporters, and the Press in general, had naturally exploited to the full, were rankling in the minds of the delegates at Edinburgh. Controversy rumbled intermittently throughout the Conference. Eventually, the section of the Council's Report which dealt with Grayson was rejected by a majority of the delegates. The four National Members of the Council, MacDonald, Hardie,

Snowden and Glasier, who had just been re-elected, thereupon resigned. They would return to work in the rank and file. Stunned by this decision, the Conference, which had not expected its exuberance to be taken so seriously, hastened apologetically to rescind its previous decisions. The four, however, remained obdurate. The I.L.P. needed a lesson, and a lesson it should have. Such was the psychological atmosphere in which MacDonald delivered his farewell address, as outgoing Chairman, after four years of office. No one could have guessed it from the speech itself. It was on the second of the three days of this stormy Conference, before the climax of the Grayson trouble, but to an audience already electric with the currents of rebellion. Under the circumstances, he had decided that his speech should be a kind of political testament, an unequivocal statement of the alternative to the sterile creed of impossibilism and violence with which the malcontents were flirting. It is a memorable statement of the creed of a moderate, a compendium of the sage counsel which created the Labour Party which the post-war generation was to know. It is easy now to assume that its triumph was inevitable. The triumph of moderation is never inevitable, unless there are moderates of MacDonald's stature. After a reference to the successes of the past year he proceeded:

At the same time, there has been just that slackening in our hold of the workers which ought to remind us in these days of industrial depression and Capitalist failure, that Socialism is not to come from the misery of the people. . . .

I know that there is a belief still fairly prevalent amongst one School of Socialist theorists that the more Capitalism fails, the clearer will the way to Socialism be, that from the misery of the people the Socialist future will arise. I have

never shared that faith. For with depression has not come more strenuous thinking, but more despairing action. Poverty of mind and body blurs the vision and does not clarify it. . . .

It is not a society unnerved with panic and distracted with hunger that advances towards Socialism, but one in which a certain success in satisfying physical needs has awakened mental desires and made easy the exercise of the social instincts and the community consciousness of the individual. . . .

Are we to accept the aims and methods of democratic government? Hitherto we have been a little too content with answering those questions by words and phrases the meanings of which were not always specific or definite. We have, for instance, declaimed against Party government whilst doing our very best to form a new Party with a written constitution. At one moment we have proclaimed the eternal justice of majority rule; at another, we have demanded that a Socialist and Labour minority should determine the work of the House of Commons. Many criticised the action of the Labour Party on the Licensing Bill without having spent an hour in considering the conditions of political advance as we in all honesty ought to have done. Even our great watchword "Independence" has not always been sufficiently well-defined. . . . But we seem to have been rather averse to discussing "Independence" as a method of Parliamentary action, and under Parliamentary conditions. If, for instance, we held the balance of power between two parties, how would we use it? Would we turn one out in preference to the other, or would we turn out first the one and then the other and make government impossible until we ourselves were wiped out for the time being by a series of General Elections that were regarded by the country as being nothing but a great nuisance?

But even before we have decided this most intricate question, we shall have been forced to define our attitude to the House of Commons itself. How are we to regard the House of Commons? I sometimes receive resolutions beginning in this way: "Seeing that the unemployed are of more impor-

tance than the rules of the House of Commons"—you know the rest. If I said that I see nothing of the kind, I would of course be misunderstood. So I shall put it in this way—The opposition between Parliamentary procedure and the question of how to deal with the unemployed is purely a fictitious one. The unemployed can never be treated by any Parliament except by one which has rules of procedure and these rules must prescribe majority responsibility. Every facility given to a minority to impose its will upon the majority is a facility which any minority can use, and not merely a Labour or a Socialist minority. To protect the conditions and existence of democratic government is just as essential to the building up of the Socialist State as is the solution of the problem of unemployment. The latter is our aim, the former is the only condition under which our aim can be secured. The Party which proposes to strike at the heart of democratic government in order to make a show of earnestness about unemployment will not only not be tolerated by the country, but does not deserve to be.

The policy we are to adopt depends fundamentally upon how we think Socialism is to come. Is it to be a sudden change? A sudden change owing to force, or a sudden change owing to legislative action? To me the first is quite unthinkable. We can cut off King's heads after a few battles; we can change a Monarchy into a Republic; we can deprive people of their titles and we can make similar superficial alterations by force; but nobody who understands the power of habit and of customs in human conduct, who appreciates the fact that by far and away the greater amount of our actions is begun, controlled and specified by the system of social inter-relationships in which we live, move and have our being; and still more, nobody who understands the delicate and intricate complexity of production and exchange which keeps modern society going, will dream for a single moment of changing it by any act of violence. As soon as that act is committed, every vital force in Society will tend to re-establish the relationships which we have been trying to end, and, what is more, these vital forces will conquer us in the form of violent reaction—a counter

revolution. On the morrow of a sudden change we would be fish out of water, and the fish will wriggle back to the water.

Will, then, the change be brought about by a revolutionary Act of the Legislature? This is equally unthinkable to me, owing to the resistance of habit of thought and action. Far be it from me to imply that this resistance amounts to immobility. In every form of life there is what I may call an internal accumulation of forces making for change. When these forces are released by the care of the scientific experimenter or by happy accident, they produce what appear to be sudden changes. In Society to-day we are aware of this pent-up accumulation of forces. Capitalism violates our moral sense as well as our reason. It brings, decade after decade, its prolific crop of industrial failures, and these industrial failures present not merely material, but also spiritual ugliness. Therein lies the hope and the promise of change which we desire, but we must work scientifically, we must organise, we must release, we must encourage, we must aid those creative forces, and no academic dogma, either regarding the way in which we are to define our Socialism, or the way in which we should carry it out, should be allowed to stand in our path in following Truth as it is revealed to us. We are called upon to take our part as a conscious factor in social evolution. Our problem is to be found at every street corner, in every factory, in every crowd, in every slum, in every workhouse. The axioms we have to use in solving the problem are to be found in the experience that organisation is mightier than disorganisation, law and order mightier than anarchy and chaos, science than rule-of-thumb, the foresight and purpose of intelligence than a happy-go-lucky faith in the virtue of "muddling through."

These words, and others like them in the years ahead, sank deep into the collective consciousness of the I.L.P. That "the greatest intellectual asset" of the left wing of Labour should have been an evolutionary, a realist and a democrat was to have incalculable effects upon British

history in the times of stress which were to come.

Yet, even while he taught the insurgents realism and moderation, his name was becoming for the man in the street a synonym for extreme doctrines. The fact is that he stood out so startlingly from his background that when the man in the street thought Socialism, he inevitably thought MacDonald—and came to associate with this symbolic figure every tenet he had ever heard ascribed to the creed. It would always be the same. During the war, whilst he was straining every nerve to save his country from the tragic error of a vindictive peace, the whole world would dub MacDonald a pacifist, merely because he came to symbolise all the heterogeneous colleagues, from peace-by-negotiation men to pacifists, whom he so far out-topped in the public eye.

The subsequent history of the brilliant young orator, who had focussed the opposition to MacDonald's leadership in 1909, proved a mysterious anti-climax. The Portsmouth Conference of the Labour Party was his opportunity. Press and public awaited a dramatic utterance on the opening day. Grayson was not there. When he did arrive, he lounged silent at the back of the hall. The final day of the Conference was his last opportunity. Once more he was not there. Hyndman (in his *Reminiscences*) asserts that Grayson had taken "a motor-drive into the country." He had. I have it on unimpeachable authority that he was kidnapped. Some acquaintances, not members of the Party, had given him an excellent lunch (he was a frank Epicurean) driven him out into the countryside—and left him there. At the next Election he lost his seat for Colne Valley, made a precarious living for a while by addressing public meetings, migrated to Australia and New Zealand, fell into some sort of discredit and enlisted in the New

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Zealand Expeditionary Force. In England he was discharged as medically unfit, wrote from hospital to a friend in the Colne Valley, was invited to pay a visit, announced the train by which he would arrive—and once more failed to turn up. From that day to this nothing more has been heard of him.

In a letter of that summer of 1909 MacDonald expressed something of his misgivings as to the current tendencies in the I.L.P.—from whose National Administrative Council he had just resigned.

To J. Bruce Glasier.

House of Commons.

23rd August, 1909.

MY DEAR BRUCE,

I have been putting the finishing touches upon the MSS. of a book¹ and have grudged every moment spent in anything else for the last week or two. So I have not written to you. I could not listen to your siren song to come up to a state of nature and catch fish. It is all very well of ex-editors, ex-agitators and other ex's, but the yoke is still upon me. Besides, I am to throw it off for some time on the 17th when I sail for India.

I hear that I.L.P. things grow a little chaotic and that drastic changes are being made in publishing in particular. Editorial committees are to be formed to supervise the work of publishing, but whether the idea is to control opinions or to supervise business I know not. Have they asked you to sign an appeal for money? Snowden and I have refused, my ground being that if I did I would be giving people to understand that I had been consulted about the project and that I approve of it. The N.A.C. ought to make itself responsible for all that kind of thing. Have you ever thought over what we should do next Easter? I am getting tired of the cheap denunciations and proposals which are being made, and yet I feel that constantly posing as the superior critic defeats its own ends. The practical difficulty is that no one can stand still. One has to be either with the party or

¹ *Socialism and Government.*

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actively working outside the party—never quiescent inside the party. I fear there will be something of a howl from the phraseologists when my book appears because it defends all that the wild men *are* doing and laughs at everything they *think* they are doing. . . .

Our children are all up in Scotland and I hope to run up for a week-end before I go. I hope the glamour of your holiday lasted throughout and that you are all full of the strength of the hills and of the mighty waters.

Yours ever,

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

* * * * *

But the problem of the extremists, the problems of its relations with the Liberal Government were only other aspects of the new Party's fundamental dilemma—the constant irritant of its own twofold composition. Here the difficulties at Westminster were only a reflection of the unending struggle which went on within the Party as a whole. At each annual Conference there was a Socialist motion; at each Annual Conference it was defeated. The arguments varied little. The movers would assert that Socialism was the only logical solution of the social problem, and that many trade unionists were Socialists already. The opponents, often Socialists themselves, would reply that, for a minority to attempt to impose Socialism on the majority of the Party would certainly disrupt it. "The Trade Unionists who made up the bulk of the Movement, would not pledge themselves to this class-consciousness." As late as the Conference of 1913 we find Will Thorne lamenting that in the Parliamentary group there were "27 out of 40 who were not Socialists at all. . . . They could quite understand that it was an utter impossibility for the 13 who belonged to the Socialist Party to agree with the others, more especially on questions of economics." What held the

Party together, however, despite all the conflicts of theory, were the undeniable practical results of unity. As W. C. Anderson put it at the same Conference, "In matters of theory trade unionists might not subscribe, but in the practical work for the lifting up of the conditions of the people there was absolutely no difference." In Parliament, however, the relations of the two wings were sometimes extremely delicate. The handful of Socialist Members in the early years naturally regarded themselves as the little leaven which leaveneth the lump; the twenty-five trade unionists, equally naturally, were disinclined for the rôle of the lump. Nowhere perhaps was the delicacy of the situation more clearly exposed than in the recurrent difficulty over the chairmanship. Hardie, as we have seen, had been elected by one vote in 1906. Before the session of 1908 opened, he let it be known that he did not wish to be nominated again, and expressed the rather surprising view that the position ought not to be held continuously by any one individual. One of Hardie's reasons for wishing to be rid of his office may well have been the sense that he was not particularly well suited for it. But there were others. In his *Autobiography* Lord Snowden quotes a letter, written towards the end of 1907, in which Hardie explained to him that:

My strongest reason for desiring to get out of the Chair is that I may be free to speak out occasionally. In the last Session the Party has practically dropped out of public notice. The comic papers and the cartoonists are ignoring us. A fatal sign! The tendency is evidently to work in close and cordial harmony with the Government, and if this policy be persisted in we shall lose our identity and be wiped out along with the Liberals, and we should richly deserve our fate. By another Session, those of us in the Party who are Socialists and who believe in fighting will have to go



LABOUR PARTY EXECUTIVE, 1909, ON THE STEPS OF THE PORTSMOUTH TOWN HALL

Back row (left to right): Edward R. Pease (*Fabian Society*), Harry Orbell (*London Dockers*), G. Harold Stuart (*Postmen's Federation*), J. S. Middleton, *Assistant Secretary*, Arthur Peters, *National Agent*.

Second row (left to right): W. Barefoot (*Woolwich Trade Council*), Philip Snowden, M.P. (*I.L.P.*), William Walker (*Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners*), J. J. Stephenson (*Amalgamated Society of Engineers*), W. C. Robinson (*United Textile Factory Workers' Association*), Walter Hudson, M.P. (*Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants*), John Hodge, M.P. (*British Steel Smelters' Association*).

Front row (left to right): J. R. Clynes, M.P. (*Gas Workers and General Labourers*), Ben Turner (*General Union of Weavers*), J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., *Secretary (I.L.P.)*, J. Keir Hardie, M.P., *Chairman (I.L.P.)*, Arthur Henderson M.P., *Treasurer (Friendly Society of Ironfounders)*, Stephen Walsh, M.P. (*Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation*).

together occasionally on our own account, and if we cannot drag the Party with us, we will "gang oor ain gait."

These are the words of a gifted free-lance rather than a ~~reigning~~ Chairman. But who was to succeed Hardie? Shackleton seemed the obvious choice. He was an effective Parliamentarian, he came from the trade-unionist majority, he was acceptable to the Liberals, and, since they could hardly expect to elect one of their own men, there was no one whom the Socialists would have preferred. Unfortunately, before Shackleton could be elected, new difficulties arose. MacDonald, who was no less disappointed than Hardie with the record of the last two sessions, had already begun to wonder whether the Socialists could continue to work with "the class-conscious Trade Unionists," and whether they should not "cut the painter and seek refuge anywhere except in this distracted little whirlpool of conflicting eddies." He now exhaustively reviewed the delicate situation in a characteristic letter to Bruce Glasier, then Editor of the *Labour Leader*, the journal of the I.L.P., a letter which searchingly illuminates the Labour Party of that time.

To J. Bruce Glasier.

Linfield,

*Chesham Bois.
(undated [late 1907]).*

MY DEAR GLASIER,

. . . A storm seems to be brewing. I was told the other day that Shackleton is so angry with criticisms passed upon him in the *Labour Leader* that he is to decline to stand for the Chairmanship of the Party in Parliament. I understand that he is to write a letter to the members. In this he is to give as one reason that he has been appointed to the Commission which will take him away three days a week, but his friends are being acquainted with the I.L.P. cause for his decision. Until I hear first hand, I cannot be quite sure

of the position. When in London the other day he did not hint anything of this kind to me, but he spent an afternoon and evening with Henderson talking things over with him. That alone looks as though the cause of division was T.U. v. Socialism. Now the question arises: What are we to do?

1. Give him assurances?
2. Ask him to reconsider without giving him any assurances?
3. Take his decision as fixed and proceed accordingly?

The two first will be put into operation by other members of the Party like G—— and B—— who are bitterly opposed to us and who have shown throughout—especially G——, petty pride and jealousy, and also who desire a Trade Union dominance. As Chairman of the I.L.P. I shall have to say something, and as far as I can see it must be that the Press must be free to criticise personal achievements, and I shall point out how unfairly (in my own judgment) I have been used by I.H.H.¹ The “my honourable friend” speech will come in handy after all.

But in the event of our having to face the third position what had better be done? It would be a little awkward at present to put a “mere” Socialist in the chair because it might hinder the process of consolidation. Then, do we want to pay anything for consolidation? Are not the rank and file bringing it about in spite of the Trade Union Parliamentary folks? Would a Socialist Chairman have such a bad effect? Further, suppose we put in a Trade Unionist Chairman now what would happen a year or two hence with the Miners in?² Could we get a Socialist Chairman then? If the position is filled otherwise than by a compromise, Henderson would stand I should think for the Trade Unionists and I would be put up by the Socialists. Barnes tells me he is willing to propose me, but he is not at all sure but that the old gang should have a look in this time. He is willing to fall in with any decisions we may come to. If I took it, I would have a troublesome time until I beat down opposition, and then Hardie’s declaration that the honours should go the rounds would mean that when

¹ Another Parliamentary correspondent of the *Labour Leader*.

² The Miners’ Members joined the Labour Party in 1909.

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the storm was blowing itself out my chances of doing effective work would be about ended. I am not in the least afraid of facing the leadership but to take the job on for a period of two years, at the maximum, is a bit discouraging for a start. It ought to be remembered, however, that the next election may fall within the next two years. So the chief question we shall have to settle is: Would it be better to give an old gang leader a chance after Hardie and get a Socialist in two years from now (if we could) or take just as much as a majority vote will give us at present? What do you think? Have you seen Clynes? You had better keep this new piece of information strictly private until you get further word. In the meantime it will guide you in *Labour Leader* articles. Don't push the other side until we have had time to discuss the position. I am very sorry that Shackleton should be so offended. Let him grumble by all means. He probably has a reason, but throw down his crown! What more can one say than that it is an unkingly act?

Yours ever,

J. R. M.

In the upshot Henderson was elected, and held office for the next two years. "Without being brilliant," wrote a colleague, "he discharged his difficult task with efficiency." The verdict could not be improved upon.

* * * * *

Another difficulty was Women's Suffrage. In the Labour Party, as in the other Parties, this issue cut across all other alignments and threatened to dissolve the oldest alliances. Unlike the other Parties, Labour, it is true, was unanimous for the vote, but that unfortunately did not exempt it from internal dissensions. Some were for the mere removal of sex disqualification, and desired the vote, consequently, for women on the same terms as for men. A measure of this sort was at least eminently logical, and possessed the further advantage of being conceivably attainable. A growing majority

of the Party, however, was suspicious of any proposal which did not enfranchise all women, and demanded complete adult suffrage, lest a partial measure should merely increase the Conservative vote. In 1907, however, when a resolution in this sense was carried at the Belfast Conference, Hardie, then Parliamentary Chairman of the Party, threatened to resign. Later in the same year, he sent a telegram of sympathy to some imprisoned militant suffragettes. To militancy MacDonald, with his deep, instinctive hatred of all violence, was inflexibly opposed. He recognised it at once as a threat to Parliament itself; and there was trouble at the I.L.P. Conference that Easter. By 1911 (for this theme may as well be pursued here to its conclusion) George Lansbury was fervently supporting the militants, in the House.

To J. Bruce Glasier.

1st Nov., 1911.

. . . The Lansbury antics are becoming so comical that, in the House of Commons at any rate, they have ceased to be serious, but I suppose they will continue to influence some of our people for some time. . . .

In 1912 Lansbury resigned his seat for Bow and Bromley, to re-contest it as a champion of militancy, preceding this quixotic gesture with a circular to the branches of the Labour Party, which urged them to agitate against its official policy. His candidature was disavowed by both the I.L.P. and the Labour Party, and the Labour Executive forbade members to assist him. In spite of which, Keir Hardie and Snowden, who had promised help before the ban was pronounced, persisted in going down to speak for him. MacDonald (who was Chairman at this time) detested indiscipline, and for a while there was considerable tension. Though he was a convinced

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advocate of women's suffrage—with a wife so active in all women's questions he could hardly have been anything else—MacDonald was not unnaturally suspicious of some of the eccentricities which the movement had begun to breed. The following letter is an exclamation of impatience with various by-products of the women's movement in politics.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

Linfield,

Chesham Bois.

4th April, 1914.

DEAR MRS. J. B. G.,

I am sorry you thought my article may have hurt Miss F. on its personal side and that generally it did not seem to recognise the rights of the unmarried woman to a free life prepared for by education and otherwise. Surely both points are misreadings of what I wrote. I said there was much physiology at the root of the *suffragette* movement. The stories I hear of some of these women only confirm my own feelings. What I think happened was this. In my article I struck a light to kindle my pipe and you approached with petrol about you and you took fire. But in view of what is happening—of the fact, for instance, that our beloved W.L.L.¹ has passed a resolution declaring that when husband and wife feel they are not getting on so well as they expected and would like a change, they ought to be able to get a divorce—must we not say some plain things to the Labour Party? This development of the women's movement and this capturing of our own by prepared resolutions, is a very great menace. By and by we shall not be safe unless we too protect ourselves by wire pulling and night marches; and it is all very hateful and unclean. If we had but one member in each branch who thought critically we should be perfectly safe. But our people feel and do not think.

There is an interesting tussle going on behind the scenes just now. If our matriarchy friends ever succeed they must get babies classified with drains, and they see it. So they

¹ Women's Labour League.

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are at the Local Government Board to take over Schools for Mothers and Baby Clinics, and not the Education Department. They are beaten for the time being, however, as you will see when the Budget speech is delivered and that will add another hair shirt to my already considerable wardrobe of uncomfortable clothes. I am truly sorry for all this. I wish they would only come and talk things over. But they will not, and it is very bad for me and will be a little disastrous for them so long as I keep at the head of the pack and get ministers to accept my advice. One day, I dare say, they will become too much for me—then, oh, will they not be happy! We must try and put things on common sense lines before that. Then they will not be able to do so much mischief. Bless their dear little unhappy hearts! If I were a little older I would kiss them and all would be well. . . .

My hands are full just now with officers' wives. My article brings your distaff on my head. My speeches on the army meeting bring their hat-pins to my body. What a devoted, well-meaning, ignorant lot they are. Ah! the shell of the tortoise is crushingly heavy. Do you see the *Times*? I am having a soul-satisfying battle with Esher, Frederick Harrison, Sir W. Anson, a few others and the Editor. I am not rusting for the want of pleasant diversion. Nor, I dare say, are you. Keep the W.L.L. straight.

With every good wish to all the family,

I am yours always sincerely,

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

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During these years, though foreign affairs were scarcely debated in the House, MacDonald continued assiduously to acquaint himself with foreign politics and foreign politicians, an essential element, he believed, in the equipment of a statesman. Each summer from 1907 to 1910 he was on the Continent, on a political mission. In three of these years he was a delegate to a Congress of the Socialist International. The composition of the British delegation to these affairs was somewhat

mysterious. Its membership was apparently unlimited in number, and it was the habit of some of the affiliated bodies to despatch as many delegates as possible, in the hope of controlling the national vote. At Stuttgart, in 1907, the delegation consisted of two representatives of the Labour Party, seven of the trade unions, fourteen of the Fabians, thirty-seven (including MacDonald) of the I.L.P., and no less than fifty-nine of the diminutive Social Democratic Federation. Although, of the twenty British votes, ten had originally been allotted to the trade unions and Labour Party, and ten to the Socialist organisations, once at Stuttgart the Socialist majority proceeded to redistribute them, fifteen to themselves and five to Labour. For many of them, as to Hyndman, the very presence of the Labour delegates was an outrage on Socialist orthodoxy. Against this manœuvre, to which, needless to say, MacDonald was not a party, the Labour delegates at once appealed to the Bureau of the Congress, which decided in their favour; a victory which was slightly discounted by the subsequent refusal of the majority of the British section to appoint either of the Labour M.P.s, MacDonald or Shackleton, to the Commission on Political Action and Trade Unions. Not content with this, the I.L.P. revived at Stuttgart the attempt, which had already more than once been made by Hyndman and his S.D.F., to exclude the Labour Party altogether, on the not unpleausible ground that it was not in fact a Socialist body. The reply of the Bureau was equivocal, and, on MacDonald's motion, it was referred back for further consideration. The Bureau, which was uncomfortably aware that the standing resolutions of the Congresses required constituent bodies to "recognise the proletarian class struggle," was not best pleased at this decision. At Brussels, in October, how-

ever, it pronounced again. The Party, it had decided now, was to be admitted, "because, although it does not avowedly recognise the class struggle, it actually carries it on." The organisation of the Labour Party, the Bureau had also convinced itself, "being independent of the bourgeois parties" must consequently be "based upon the class struggle." Hyndman, a British member of the Bureau, and cynically aware of the dependence of "the non-Socialist trade unionists" (as he called them) of the Labour Party upon electoral arrangements with the Liberals, bitterly but unavailingly resisted this decision. In spite, however, of the not entirely fraternal tactics of their British colleagues, the Labour delegation of 1907 reported that they considered the Stuttgart Conference "an excellent means of securing a better understanding between the workers of all countries." And at Stuttgart, at any rate, MacDonald had made a speech which was long remembered by many of its hearers. The flashing eyes and dignified bearing of the speaker, the magnificently musical and powerful voice, which was easily audible to the whole of a vast gathering in the open air, the fervid yet sagacious words—all these combined to make an overwhelming impression. From the Copenhagen Congress of 1910, however, the two Labour delegates, of whom MacDonald was one, had once more to complain feelingly of the anomalous composition and mutual rivalries of the British section. Nevertheless, it was well that the adolescent British Labour Party, however illogically, maintained its foothold in the Socialist International. Its presence there gave MacDonald a platform from which, after the war, to fight Russian Communism, with lasting effects upon world history. On the eve of his departure for the Copenhagen Congress in 1910 he wrote to Glasier.

P A R L I A M E N T A R I A N

To *J. Bruce Glasier.*

Lossiemouth,
19th August, 1910.

To knock about the world after Copenhagen is forbidden to us. We leave with much reluctance our little ones here under the charge of our new "Jennie Davies," and the soul within me is tired. I did not know how tired till I came up here. So we want to get back and we grudge the time we are away. I am specially sorry you cannot go to Hamburg. I wanted to get Hardie too but was told not to take him. I hope he will not be offended when he hears of the meeting; but we may arrange for him to come when we all get together at Copenhagen. I have had another letter from Südekum.¹ He wants to raise a row with "the Prussians" at Copenhagen. He declines to "coo like a bear" any longer and is practising English idiom, so as to express himself in German with sufficient nastiness. . . .

At Whitsun in the previous year, a delegation from the Labour Party paid a visit to Germany, and was given a civic reception in a number of towns, and a lunch in the Reichstag building, at which both MacDonald and von Bethmann-Hollweg spoke. This expedition involved more conviviality and less controversy than the Congresses of the International. But even here there were difficulties. The Labour delegation was being feted by German municipalities and other non-Socialist hosts. This of course was contrary to every canon of class-conscious international Socialism. The German Socialists were horrified. They dispatched eloquent and voluminous letters of protest to England, and soon were able to display a critical article in the *Labour Leader* to their over-friendly visitors. The tourists were surprised, but obstinate. They had come out as a delegation from the Parliamentary Labour Party to visit the German people,

¹ A Socialist Member of the German Reichstag, who had lectured in Britain under I.L.P. auspices in 1908.

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they were thoroughly enjoying themselves, and they had no intention, even if they had been capable, of transforming themselves into a class-conscious Socialist embassy. The notion that it was improper to fraternise with the German people as a whole, though natural to Continental Socialism, was still quite foreign to the British Labour Party.

To J. Bruce Glasier.

3 Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, W.C.
14th June, 1909.

MY DEAR GLASIER,

I was very sorry, indeed, to have to appear in the *Leader*, particularly at the present moment, as opposing you in any way, but it simply had to be done, and if I had not done it, Barnes or Jowett would, and they would have written much more strongly than I have done.

When we got to Berlin, Bernstein telephoned to us, and was the first to draw our attention to your article. He came and had a cup of coffee with Barnes and myself, privately, and brought down the *Labour Leader* specially for us to see what you had written. Legiene was the only one who, apparently, talked to us as they had talked to you, but when Barnes took your article and went over it point by point and accused them of having inspired it, it was Legiene who said that that was a mistake. I never got the telegram, but a copy of it was handed to me at the Social Democrat Offices. Our information about the ex-Minister came, first of all, from Bernstein.

Now, regarding the Club or Association—it does not matter which—I cannot remember the wording of my letters, but I never had it in my mind that we were captured. I did have it strongly in my mind that it was a little *infra dig.* of us to go to Germany under “auspices” other than our own, and I explained how it had come about. We were obliged to be non-political because we were informed that we would have to be that to be received officially by municipalities like Cologne and Frankfurt. When we got to Frankfurt, we

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were not received officially by the Municipality, and it has been explained to me since that that was owing to a speech which Hardie delivered in South Wales in which he explained in detail what we were going to do and what we were going to say. As a result, the Lord Mayor of Frankfurt stated that the mission was to be political and Party, and that Frankfurt as such could not, therefore, receive us. There was no *quid pro quo* at all. When we went as official representatives of a part of the British people to the whole of the German people, and not to a section of the German people, municipalities like Cologne said "Whilst you are in our midst, we make arrangements for hospitality," but I am informed that, with that exception, everything was paid for by ourselves, except the run from Bremen to Southampton which a friendly director of the North German Lloyd offered us as a tribute of respect to the Labour Party of England, and an offering of peace. I talked the matter over with several of our hosts on the way, and I have not the least qualm of conscience—no more qualm of conscience than if I had gone to some person's house to open a debate or to convey a message, and was offered whilst there a cup of tea. I would not, of course, take opportunity of such an offer to stand up on a chair and deliver an address on Socialism to whoever might be in the drawing-room at the time.

I hope, however, you will find that what I have written to the *Leader* this week will not necessitate any controversial reply. Beer has been to see me, and he agrees that, under the circumstances, we did the right thing, and regrets that he wrote his letter before waiting for further information.

I am glad you have had a good time at Blackburn. I shall try and have a talk with Hardie to-day about things in general, including the Czar's visit.

With kindest regards,

Yours very sincerely,
J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

In addition to these Continental Conferences, the world-wide journeyings of husband and wife continued. Nominally holidays, they usually developed into large-

scale political progresses. "Our only chance," wrote Mrs. MacDonald, as they started round the world in 1906, "of having three meals a day together . . . is to run away altogether from you. I think we can tolerate four or five months of our own dear selves." But she was too optimistic. Only on board ship was a respite from politics possible. A Canadian trade union leader met them in a tender below Quebec. A cluster of his colleagues awaited them on the quay. And thenceforth it was receptions, interviews and Labour delegations all the way. At Ottawa they paid several visits to the Deputy Minister of Labour, conversed with Cabinet Ministers and visited Government House. At Toronto they were taken to a Labour Temple, and at Winnipeg, which was celebrating Labour Day, the first Monday in September, they drove through thronged streets in the leading carriage of a gala procession, and subsequently watched a baseball match, in an interval of which MacDonald had to address the vast concourse of spectators. On Vancouver Island they visited the mining centres and studied its labour problems. Australia was more strenuous still. An Election was in the offing, and MacDonald was naturally hailed by the Labour Party there as a heaven-sent ally in the task of laying the bogey that Socialism stood for irreligion and the break-up of family life. All this, of course, meant more speeches and conferences. Their six days in Sydney, Mrs. MacDonald thought, were the most crowded even she had ever experienced. They investigated Wage Boards and Compulsory Arbitration, visited land settlements and advised on Labour Leagues. The voyage home, with two days at Colombo, probably did little more than compensate for the previous exhaustion.

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Their last long journey together was to India, in 1909. She hoped that it would mean a rest for him. But she went with a certain foreboding, and, for once, she was uneasy at leaving the children. There was a pleasantly lazy voyage out in a shipload of returning *sahibs*. As they sighted India, they noted the remarkable change which came over their fellow travellers. "They appear on the morning of landing in their helmets. Novels, flirtations and listlessness are things of the past. They are energetic; they are again imperial and imperious; they are of the governing caste, the masters of men."

The book in which MacDonald subsequently summarised his Indian impressions and opinions (*The Awakening of India*, 1910) crams into a comparatively small space an astonishing amount of observation, insight and prophetic common sense. It exhibits the extraordinarily wide range of the author's political gifts. It is penetrating, lucid and concise. It has been described as the best short book on India ever written by a tourist. From the economics of the Bengal Land Settlement to the interplay of mysticism and politics in the Hindu mind, the writer pierces to near the heart of almost every facet of the intricate political problem of India. It is the work of an essentially balanced mind, refreshingly free from bitterness and prejudice. Though he has searching criticisms to make of British rule, and lays his finger on weaknesses then scarcely recognised, he is no indiscriminate partisan, and shuts his eyes neither to the merits of the rulers nor the shortcomings of the ruled. The memory of "Paget M.P.," Kipling's celebrated satire on the sentimental touring Radical anti-imperialist, was affectionately treasured, as MacDonald soon discovered, in every Mess and Government House in India, and

British officials were probably at first suspicious that their inquiring Socialist visitor might prove to be a second, and an even more formidable, Paget. "They assume," MacDonald comments ironically in the Preface to his book,

that no one can understand them and their problems unless his eyes have been blinded by the Indian sun, and his mind moulded by Anglo-Indian habits for a generation. . . . To such persons this book will be but further evidence of the wickedness of the world, the impertinence of men, and the bitterness of the cup to be drained by Anglo-Indians.

The natural prejudice of almost all the rulers of India against any critic of Sahibdom did not however blind the visitor to their essential good qualities. If only, he reflected, the Civil Servant would confine his reading for a year to Radical newspapers, "so as to acquire some knowledge of Western politics," and to works of humour "so as to become a little thick-skinned," then "nobody on this earth would be like him." At one time, MacDonald, who was inclined to be over-suspicious, complained that he was being shadowed and that his correspondence was tampered with. The authorities, however, were able to produce instructions to the police that there was to be no surveillance, and explained, further, that in the hot weather sealing-wax in mail bags was apt to melt.

From Baroda, where they conversed with native Ministers, they travelled to Rajputana, where the Maharana told them that he stood for the old ways. "It is well that the old ways should not die," replied MacDonald. At Simla they observed with attention the cream of government society, "in India," as MacDonald said, "but not of it, of the West but not in it." In the Khyber Pass they admired the fighting qualities of the

Pathan, and at Lahore, a microcosm of the complex conflicts of India, they inspected the Arya Somaj College, met a Committee of the Indian National Congress, dined with the Moslem League and cross-questioned British officials. In the Punjab they could see how, thanks to the refusal of the Mahomedan to turn nationalist, nationalism was dissolving into "a Hindu Sinn Fein." At Benares they glimpsed the immemorial mysteries of Indian religion, and in Bengal, which was "translating nationalism into religion, into music and poetry, into painting and literature," they studied the elusive Babu. "There are excellent speakers," observed MacDonald, "and eloquent writers, but none of the prominent men seems to have that heaven-given capacity to lead."

After mature reflection upon this bewildering kaleidoscope, the conclusions at which he arrived, clear-sighted and even prophetic, were far from reproducing the ready-made opinions of any one sect of partisans. "I found myself," he says, "in a camp almost by myself." His own explanation was that "I went out with the ideas of modern collectivism in my mind." That, no doubt, had something to do with it, but his own characteristic combination of reforming zeal with shrewd moderation probably had more. Can the immense heterogeneity of India, he wonders, ever be welded into one whole? Undoubtedly, in its early days British rule had saved India from chaos. And the first British administrators, ten months distant from London, understood the people better because, inevitably, they lived closer to them. The decline of that first sympathy is perhaps the most fundamental of the defects which MacDonald noted in modern India. The gulf between rulers and ruled was at its widest, he thought, under Curzon, whom he obviously regarded as the worst possible kind of Viceroy. (Some

years later, Lord Morley invited MacDonald, who had long been a friend of his, to a party at the Athenæum in honour of Curzon. MacDonald used to describe with gusto the look of horror which passed over the face of the guest of honour when he was presented to him.) This decay of sympathy appeared to MacDonald to underlie most of our mistakes in India. We were too ready, for example, to ignore the value of ancient Indian traditions, merely because they were alien to the traditions of the West—by tradition, in its right place, he always set great store. The Indian, we complain, bears false witness; and, by our standards, he certainly does. But the Indian witness, after all, takes much the same view of his duties as does an English barrister. He is frankly a partisan—“one who tells a tale and runs the gauntlet of a hostile examination.” That fundamental contrast in outlook was but one symptom of the need that we should “retrace some of our steps to native methods of justice.” It was perhaps owing to the general decay of sympathetic understanding, too, that we so often over-emphasised the merits of Westernisation—destroying, for example, the old economic system, in which the much-abused *bannia* played a useful part, without putting anything satisfactory in its place. It was, says MacDonald characteristically, perfectly just, that British investors should receive interest on the capital they had sunk in India—criticism on this score (whose counterpart he had heard also in Australia) “does not reflect credit on those who make it.” The fact remained that our administration was expensive, and sometimes needlessly expensive. Indians took bribes, but did not our officials “from school inspectors to chaplains” charge public funds with travelling expenses which they had in fact never spent? There should be an Auditor General,

responsible to the India Office, or to the House of Commons itself. Our famine work was beyond praise, but we did not spend enough on education. It was a pity that Indian officialdom was not more subject to Parliamentary criticism, and that there was no interchange of officers with the Home service. Then, we had failed to recognise the importance of the growing class of educated Indians. "It is as true in India as it is in the West that a few make the opinions of the many and that the cells which determine growth are of an insignificant bulk compared with those which maintain form and mass." "The educated Indian is the natural co-operator with the administration"; yet he was becoming increasingly alienated. Friendly to the first beginnings of political agitation, we were now bitterly hostile, and had handed over Congress, which had once merely demanded some measure of responsible government, to the domination of its own left wing. The Anglo-Indian Press attacked Indians, but retorts in the native Press were regarded as sedition. In effect, MacDonald thought, the *Civil and Military Gazette* was more dangerous to British rule than the *Bengali*. The regrettable exclusiveness of the British in British India was pleasantly absent from the Native States, where Europeans and Indians mixed on easy terms. Baroda and Gwalior might not be so efficient as the British Raj, but efficiency is not everything, and the Native States were at least enabling the Indian mind to fulfil itself. Morley's reforms, MacDonald saw, were as certain to lead to Parliamentary government as was the Act of 1832 to democracy in Britain. Proportional Representation was inevitable, and the drift of the Mahomedans towards a working alliance with Congress. But to the eye of a Collectivist like MacDonald, perhaps the greatest danger

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ahead was "an Industrialism far less controlled than ours was a century ago, armed with opportunities of exploitation far more dangerous than ours ever were." India, in fine, with its medley of warring elements, would need Britain for many years to come, but it would have to be a more understanding Britain and a more independent India. For the author of this remarkable book destiny reserved the task of fulfilling many of his own prophecies.

Early in 1910, he returned to England and the darkest years of his life. But perhaps what he wrote of his wife was true of him also. "India led her into those temples where the Eternal and infinite sit imperturbable, full of both joy and sorrow, but knowing neither, and from which human beings return prepared to meet whatever is in store for them."

VII

S H A D O W S

1910-1911

The Awakening of India is dedicated to “the two who took much interest in the journey but who never saw this book.” On February 3, 1910, their small son, David, died. This was a blow from which Mrs. MacDonald never entirely recovered. Eight days later, another fell. On February 8, when MacDonald should have been attending a Labour Special Conference on the Osborne judgment, he had to take train hurriedly for Lossiemouth, where his mother was seriously ill. She did not know her son when he arrived, and on the 11th she died. She had overtaxed her strength in the preparation of the Hillocks, the new home which MacDonald had just had built for her. This modest grey villa among the working-class homes—MacDonald had carefully avoided the fashionable new summer visitors’ quarter—was in due course to be known all over the world. Save that, as the children grew older, four small single rooms—usually spoken of as “horse-boxes”—appeared, two on each flank, the Hillocks stands to-day as MacDonald built it, and as it stood during his premierships, when, to their politely concealed surprise, foreign magnates and ambassadors would find themselves interviewing the Prime Minister of Great Britain in a diminutive bed-sitting-room. Mrs. Ramsay had begun a brief attempt to cultivate the garden; later, as MacDonald became famous, the flowers were mercilessly plundered by souvenir-hunters, and for a long while now the small enclosure has been left

undisturbed to its native tangle of gorse bushes. While these two blows were being struck by fate, Mrs. MacDonald had learned that her close friend, Mary Middleton, wife of MacDonald's assistant in the Labour Party Secretaryship, was seized by a fatal malady. From now on she herself seemed to walk constantly in the shadow of death.

They had hurried back from India for the General Election of January, 1910. On the last day of November, the Lords had recklessly put the coping stone on their repeated mutilation of Liberal Bills by rejecting Lloyd George's Budget. Labour accordingly fought the Election on unexpectedly favourable ground. The Conservative Party in general, towards which the inevitable swing of the political pendulum was already in motion, was almost entirely obscured by the unedifying spectacle of noble allies who figured both as anti-Constitutionalists and as tax-evaders. Moreover, the notorious Osborne judgment had provided Labour with both a major grievance and a first-rate rallying cry. Mr. Justice Farwell, all three judges in the Court of Appeal (28th November, 1908) and all five Law Lords in the Upper House (21st December, 1909) had held that it was illegal for a trade union to raise funds for political purposes by a compulsory levy on its membership. Privileges exercised for fifty years had been swept away. The foundations, indeed the very existence, of the Labour Party, was threatened. Not only had the Unions' political levy been pronounced *ultra vires*; the judgment of one Law Lord, at least, had implied that the Labour Party itself was unlawful, on the ground that it exacted (though by no means always enforced) a binding pledge from its Members of Parliament. The combination of this unexpected menace (as yet



ABOLITION OF POOR LAW CONFERENCE, 1910

Left to right in front: Frank Smith (holding bag), Charles W. Bowerman, M.P.,
J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., David Shackleton, M.P.

S H A D O W S

however not fully understood by the Unions) and the provocation by the Lords did not however suffice to carry Labour forward, and, though MacDonald won comfortably again at Leicester, the Party lost five seats on the balance. Moreover, more obviously than ever, it depended on its tacit alliance with the Government. Of its seventy-eight candidates only twenty-six had encountered official Liberal opposition, and of these not one had been elected.

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The opening session of the new Parliament was mainly occupied with passing three resolutions on the Lords' veto. At the end of March, MacDonald made his first full-dress pronouncement in Parliament on the relations between the two Houses. The Labour Party's own choice would have been Abolition and Single Chamber Government. That being however, as MacDonald admitted, manifestly not the choice of the electorate, Labour was prepared to accept the Government's proposals for curtailing the powers of the Lords. But it was resolute against the various suggestions which came from the Conservative benches, for some changes or other in the composition of the Upper House which would justify its retention of the existing veto. A scheme of this nature from Lord Hugh Cecil enabled MacDonald to explain ironically how much more genuinely Conservative was his own policy—preserve the fabric but reduce its capacities for doing harm—than that of the ultra-Conservative Member for Oxford University. It was an intriguing theme, and the speaker got a good deal of quiet enjoyment out of allowing his audience, most of which regarded him as a prince of iconoclasts, mystifying glimpses of the deep veneration for the past which lay at the heart of his Socialism.

I am bound to say that I agree with the Noble Lord that under these circumstances or any circumstances the change which we propose should be of the nature of organic and not revolutionary mechanical change. The difference between him and myself is this: he, in the delightful political Utopia which he pictured with so much chastity of language and felicity of phrase, is of opinion that he can pull down this old fabric and rebuild it, that he can put new stones into the structure between the old stones, while I am for preserving what we have got and taking care that it will not fall down and endanger His Majesty's subjects. I preserve, and he rebuilds and restores. He knows perfectly well, from the point of view of Constitutional taste and æsthetic fine feeling, that he is in the wrong and I am in the right.

Now, as always, he made abundantly clear the distinction between what he held to be salutary and reverend in ancient tradition, and what was a mere vulgar accretion upon it.

On the shoulders of our ancient aristocracy tippets hang naturally, and the coronets sit quite properly upon their brows, but on the shoulders of our newer nobility, of those who have just left holiday-making on Blackpool sands, the tippets do not hang naturally. They are not an aristocracy. They have purchased their way into the other House, and whatever respect—and I am bound to say that, as far as I am concerned, I have a respect for them—we have for the old aristocracy, we have absolutely none for the new. Therefore, I am not at all in favour of the reform.

Utterances such as these illumine the paradox of MacDonald. He was a leader of the insurgents, feared and suspected by every upholder of the existing order; yet he never attempted to conceal his respect for much that was traditional and even irrational. And this unusual frankness made him of course a more formidable insurgent. The assault is always more deadly when it

is discriminating. A passage from a later speech, in a debate of February of 1911, aptly illustrates the unusual combination of iconoclasm and traditionalism which can be traced from the very outset of his career.

At the same time, I am bound to admit that . . . the majority of the people of this country insist, and will insist, upon a bi-cameral system of government. It is of no use to shut our eyes to the facts of the situation. I regret that it should be so. I am frankly in favour of a Single Chamber. . . . The qualifications of a Second Chamber to our mind are twofold. It ought to have a certain amount of æsthetic value, and it ought not to conflict with our political principles. A picturesque House of Lords has a certain value in the Constitution. There are certain ceremonies which are meaningless but nevertheless of considerable picturesque and educational value, which we go through from time to time in connection with our legislative processes, and I would be the last man to suggest a constitutional change that would abolish those picturesque ceremonies. The Second Chamber ought, therefore, to have an historical foundation, and to have its roots deeply dug in the ancient soil which has borne the various products and fruits of our historical achievements.

The Veto resolutions kept the House busy during the first half of 1910. No progress was made towards effacing the Osborne judgment. Moreover Labour found itself in a new and embarrassing tactical situation. The Liberals, with 275 seats, and the Conservatives, with 273, were in almost exact equipoise. The Labour 40 and the 82 Irish Nationalists held the balance. The last thing the Labour Party desired was to turn out the Government. It could ill afford the expenses of another election, nor did it wish to see the Liberal Government replaced by the Conservatives. It had accordingly to be uncomfortably circumspect. If Labour moved an

amendment, and the entire Conservative strength rallied to its support it might mean, unless the Irish chose to save them, the end of the Liberal administration. Thus, when in March, 1910, MacDonald moved an official Party resolution on the Wages of Government Employees, and it unexpectedly became apparent that the Conservatives would support it, sixteen of the nineteen Labour Members voting had to hurry into the ‘*No*’ Lobby against their own amendment. Nor was it always easy to explain these tactics to the rank and file. At the next annual Conference MacDonald had to defend the Group against the charge of having shelved an amendment on the ground that it might have brought down the Government. He made it clear that to eject the Liberals would serve no Labour interest. Would unemployment, he asked ironically, unemployment, “the last problem to be solved before we had a better state of organisation,” be “solved by a few dissolutions?”

By April the three Resolutions were through and a Parliament Bill was to follow. And then, most unexpectedly, on May 6, 1910, King Edward died. The reign of George the Fifth was opening under lowering clouds. From June to November a Constitutional Conference, of four Liberal, and four Conservative leaders, toiled to arrive at an accommodation on the interlocked issues of Irish Home Rule and the Lords’ Veto. Not till November 10 was its failure announced. Neither the Labour Party nor the Irish had been represented at these discussions, and Labour strongly disapproved both of the Conference, as unrepresentative of the whole House, and of the political truce as “demoralising.” During the negotiations a bold attempt was made at an even wider field of agreement. Mr. Lloyd George proposed a coalition with the Conservatives to the Prime Minister.

Such a Government, he thought, could carry, not only agreed measures on Ireland and the Lords, but an agreed programme of Social Reform, Development of Agriculture and National Military Training, and even, after an inquiry, an agreed Tariff Policy. The Liberal and Conservative leaders approved the proposal, but it seems to have been rejected by the Conservative machine. In her biography, *Arthur Henderson*, Mrs. Hamilton asserts that MacDonald tentatively accepted an offer of a place for himself in the proposed Coalition, on the understanding that he should bring in two Under Secretaries with him; and that he actually sounded Henderson and G. W. Roberts as to whether they would be willing to accept these subordinate offices. It is a strange story and, if it were true, would do little credit to MacDonald's political judgment. Not that, in the writer's opinion at any rate, there would have been anything discreditable in the notion of an all-Party Coalition on the basis proposed in 1910. Such a Government with such a programme might well have saved Europe from the war of 1914. But, though the notion of a Coalition was not discreditable, as far as Labour was concerned it was what, in politics at any rate, is almost worse than discreditable—it was impracticable. The very foundation of Labour politics was independence. Moreover, the doctrine of Collectivism, MacDonald's Evolutionary Socialism, had not yet spread far enough in the other Parties to make an agreed three-Party programme of domestic reform possible in 1910. Indeed, as we have seen, in a sense, owing to the fresh burst of controversy which broke out when it was espoused by the new Party, Collectivism was in many ways less likely to afford common ground for all Parties in 1910 than it had been in 1890. Nothing short of a national emergency on the grand scale, such

as that of 1914, could have taken Labour into a Coalition in 1910. And it is extremely unlikely that so shrewd a political realist as MacDonald would have seriously considered the idea for a moment. "I am not at all in favour of Coalition Government" he had said in debate on the relations between the two Houses (March 30). But as a matter of fact it seems equally unlikely that a proposal of office was ever either made to MacDonald or passed on by him to his colleagues. MacDonald, for one thing, was not even leader of the Party in 1910, nor had Labour been represented at the Constitutional Conference, out of which the project of a Coalition sprang. Moreover Mr. Lloyd George, who was the centre of the whole negotiation, has been good enough to tell me that he does not believe that a place in the projected Cabinet was ever offered to MacDonald, and that his opinion is emphatically corroborated by Mr. Winston Churchill. Lord Crewe, who was so close to Asquith at the time, also feels sure that no offer was made. Mr. J. H. Thomas too discounts the story, as does Mr. Barnes, who was still at that time Chairman of the Labour Party. Mr. Barnes tells me that he knows of no reason to doubt MacDonald's loyalty to the Party, nor does he consider it in the least likely that, if other Labour Coalitionists were required, either Henderson or Roberts would have been selected. Against this must be set the fact that Arthur Henderson, as I have been told by two persons who had it from his own lips, seems clearly to have believed that at any rate an offer of some kind was made, and that he was sounded on it. Perhaps, as a precautionary measure, MacDonald asked Henderson for his opinion of such a proposal, if it should ever be made; and this may have combined with rumour in the Lobbies, always suspicious of mysterious transactions

behind the scenes, to exaggerate the importance of the incident. There was always apt to be an atmosphere of mystery about MacDonald; during the war he referred ironically to the frequency with which, before 1914, many of those who were now supporting a Coalition Government themselves had groundlessly suspected him of engineering an alliance with the Liberals. And his conduct in 1931 may perhaps have revived vague memories of those earlier suspicions in the minds of some who disapproved of it. But if there were any substance in the rumours, it is almost incredible that they should not have been voiced in public. At the Labour Conference in February of 1911, as at all other Conferences, there were plenty of critics only too anxious for sticks with which to beat their leaders; indeed two heated debates, in which MacDonald was closely engaged, centred on the charge that Labour in Parliament was not sufficiently independent. If any of the malcontents had so much as suspected that the man who was about to become Leader of the Party had, even for a moment, toyed with the notion of Coalition, their cries of indignation would have rent the heavens. Yet neither then nor at any other stage of the Conference, nor at the subsequent Annual Conference of the I.L.P., was the accusation so much as whispered. Next year, rumours were put about that MacDonald intended to enter a reconstructed Liberal Cabinet. As to which, the editorial remarks in the I.L.P.'s *Labour Leader*, of August 4, 1911, are sufficient comment.

. . . recently an organised Press campaign has been set on foot for the purpose of trying to damage and discredit Mr. MacDonald. His ability is admitted, but the latest move is an attempt to stab him in the back with lying and poisonous rumours. Reports are carefully spread that he

has been offered a place in the Liberal Ministry, that he is at present bargaining as to terms, that he will be included in a reformed Liberal Cabinet. These reports are simply malicious gossip and slander issued for the express purpose of working mischief and deluding simpletons. To treat them seriously is to insult Mr. MacDonald.

A lady who was staying in the MacDonalds' house about this time remembers his receiving a letter in which there was some talk of the possibility of his being offered a Cabinet post—and how he tossed it contemptuously across the table, observing "I shall never take office, till *I am head of a Labour Government!*"

* * * * *

Eight days after the breakdown of the Constitutional Conference, Asquith announced another dissolution. The election, in December, scarcely changed the balance of the Parties. Liberals and Conservatives, this time each with 272, were once more equally matched. Once more the Irish with 84, and Labour with 42 unwillingly held the balance. This time Labour was two seats to the good, and it had won three of its forty-two in the teeth of Liberal opposition.

The time, which he had foreseen before Henderson was elected in 1908, for MacDonald's inevitable Chairmanship had now arrived. He had been, as a colleague said at the Party Conference of 1912, "the engineer of the whole movement." Incomparably the most distinguished figure, as well as the ablest Parliamentarian, in the Party he was moreover, all through his life, a superb Chairman in Committee. He had an uncanny knack for keeping discussion relevant and practical, and, what is rarer, could always recognise the moment when, irrelevance or no irrelevance, a colleague must needs unburden himself—on which occasions he would often quietly

write a letter until the digression was over. He was, however, far from eager for the position. Curiously inaccurate accounts of MacDonald's election have been published. Thus Mrs. Hamilton (*Arthur Henderson*, p. 72) asserts that he was not eligible until he resigned the Secretaryship of the Party, nominally on grounds of ill health, in 1911, that Henderson thereupon toiled devotedly to secure his election, that, on Henderson's initiative, the election of Chairmen ceased to be annual, and that, again on Henderson's initiative, in order that he might retain his place on the executive MacDonald was now elected Treasurer of the Party by the Conference as a whole, and not by the executive. All these assertions appear to be erroneous. In fact MacDonald could have been elected at any time since he entered Parliament, although, in the interests of efficient organisation, he could not long have remained both Chairman and Secretary. But he remained Secretary of the Party for nearly a year after he became Chairman of the Parliamentary group in February, 1911, did not announce his intention to resign until August, and, as Secretary, signed the Report to the Party Conference of January, 1912. Nor did he owe his election to Henderson's sole initiative. Indeed, the words quoted by Mrs. Hamilton as if spoken by Henderson himself, on the desirability of MacDonald's continuing to sit on the Executive and as the elect of the Party as a whole, are actually taken from the written annual Report of the Executive Committee, of which Henderson was neither Chairman nor Secretary. Nor did the Chairman's election cease now to be annual; the Parliamentary Report to subsequent Conferences regularly records his re-election.

Lord Snowden records that in December, 1910, when it was known that Mr. Barnes, who had been seriously

ill, did not desire to be re-elected Chairman, MacDonald wrote to him that "in view of the disloyal action of certain of our colleagues" he could not think of accepting the office himself. A few days later he had changed his mind, and wrote to ask Snowden to make inquiries as to how the land lay—"I could not do this myself, as I should be open to the charge that I am working for my own hand"—a request which Lord Snowden promptly declined, "as I had always kept aloof from anything of the nature of Party intrigues." But there was remarkably little personal ambition in MacDonald's attitude to the Chairmanship. Seldom can a more reluctant leader have been elected. He possessed, as he must have known, unrivalled qualifications for the post. In intellectual and Parliamentary equipment, in dignity of bearing, in knowledge of the world none of his colleagues could be even compared with him. His integrity was unquestioned. But, as he must also have known, there were drawbacks too. The days of his raw and youthful intransigence, when the Fabians had marked him down as an impossibilist, were long past. He had shed none of his ideals, but wider experience and his native shrewdness had combined to produce a singularly level-headed realist. Now, and for the rest of his career, he was the essential moderate. But all leadership involves manœuvre, compromise, the slow outflanking of obstacles, the mastering of irritating detail. And despite its matchless rank and file, sober, steady and enthusiastic, leadership of the Labour Party would mean constant association with a large minority of the men he called "phraseologists," men who were oblivious of detail, and made no allowance for obstacles, men who could never understand why the walls of Jerico should not fall to the mere blast of the oratorical trumpet. MacDonald found the phraseologists

very trying. He never lost his patience in public. At Conference after Conference he would meet their well-meaning, but usually ill-informed, criticisms with lucid, temperate and unanswerable exposure of the realities. But he would fret in private. And his nerves were too often taut. He found it hard to laugh off the minor irritations. And after his wife's death he found it harder still. He would sometimes, too, suspect hostility or bad faith where it did not exist. Moreover there was much of the artist in him. His sense of style was irrepressible. At anything radically vulgar, at bad Parliamentary manners, at slipshod speech or thought he would secretly shudder. All this was not a disqualification for leadership. But it meant that leadership would impose an exacting strain.

3. L.I.F.
(Undated [late in 1910]).

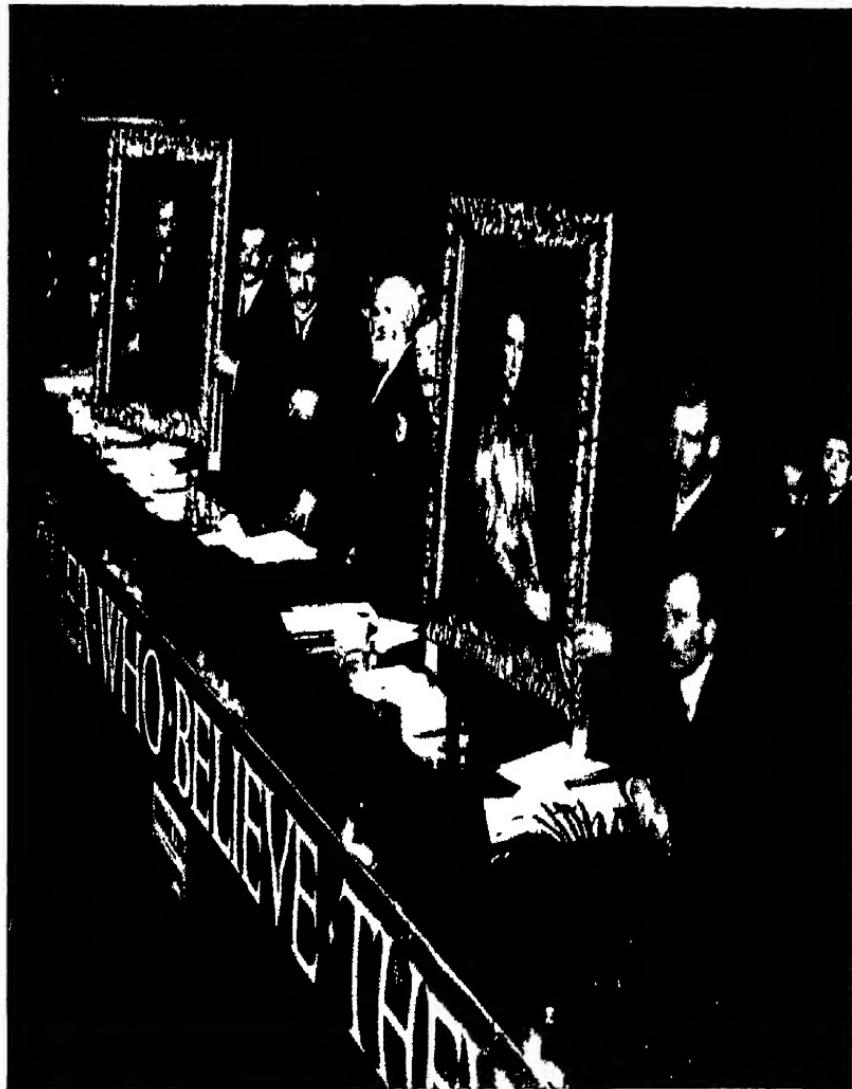
To J. Bruce Glasier.

. . . I have just heard from the nurse attending Barnes that he is doing quite well and that she has nursed several similar cases. So far so good; but of the political importance of the illness there is no room for doubt. His illness changes the whole situation—unfortunately against my desires and intentions. I do not want the chairmanship. Last year I was not keen, after a beastly letter I had from Hardie, for it, but I wrote Shackleton a letter saying that I would put myself in the hands of the Party. It is not true to say I refused to take it. But the events of the year and the continued experience of the Party made me become firmer and firmer in my opinion that under present circumstances I should let the whole thing alone. You refer to Hardie's unfortunate ways of doing things. Yes, and you might have added: To be continued in our next. Within the last month or two he has been worse than ever. I do not wish to quarrel with him openly, indeed I am doing everything I can to avoid it, but were I chairman I could not prevent such a misfortune. He is not playing the straight and square game and is

determined to regard himself as a free-lance when it suits him and as a member of a team when that suits. If he is not to do the square thing with a chairman and is so anxious to play first fiddle, he ought to offer himself as a candidate for the chair again. I shall certainly not stand in his way. I am a member of the I.L.P. and in the H. of C. as such, and if I (or any other member of the I.L.P.) happen to have anything in hand surely it is my duty to consult with my friends and see how the land lies: it is imperative to do so if the Chairman is an I.L.P.-er. Instead of that, my chairmanship would only make him more individualistic than he is, and make him pitch his tent in the woods farther away from us than ever. Can you visualise such a thing and yet feel happy about it? I see in it nothing but vexation of spirit and barrenness of effort. There are others in the same boat. And they come to me and say, "Oh! there is nobody else. Take the job. Give up £150 a year¹ for the honour of being our figurehead. Settle it like a good fellow. It's worrying us and we want to continue our studies on how to smash up things and go on voting in whatever damned lobby we jolly well like." That's the temper of the Party to-day.

The coercion of the position (increased by Barnes' illness) lies in "there's nobody else," and I see that driving me into a fix. I want a year of peace, for surely I have had enough of the other thing this year. And I see nothing but storms and heartaches ahead. I shall not lead as a great many people want, because I shall say what I mean, whereas so many of our folks want declamation, stage dressing, paint and daggers in the belt. I can fight that battle more effectively as a non-official than as a chairman. But that might be faced: it might be my duty to face it, and that is not what is weighing most heavily on me. Have you thought about the Secretaryship? I cannot keep both. Indeed, judging by recent newspaper pars. some folks are determined that I shall not keep both. And that point of view is quite reasonable. (1) It would be a gross monopoly of authority; but (2) It is a physical impossibility to combine both offices. The Chairmen of the Party have all failed for this amongst

¹ The salary as Secretary of the Party.



KEIR HARDIE PRESENTS MACDONALD WITH TWO PORTRAITS
BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON AT BIRMINGHAM, 1912

Keir Hardie is seen shaking hands with MacDonald. Arthur Henderson is on MacDonald's right.

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other reasons. None gave enough time and forethought to their work. They thought they could walk down to the House and be Chairmen. It can't be done. A Chairman has to spend at least two hours every morning with the business of the House before he leaves home. That cannot be added to the office work. So the proposition is not "Be Chairman also," but "Leave the Secretaryship and be the Chairman instead"—some adding, "for two years only, mind." If I were to give up £150 during the next year or so, I should have to make it some other way as my income exceeds my expenditure by the narrowest of margins. I have invested nothing for two years and I am committed to some things which are likely to cost me dear—amongst others my dear old *Pioneer*.¹

Now, there's the situation. Who will say that I ought to accept the Chairmanship? Only one man. And he will simply shrug his shoulders and say: "Who else?" There, particularly now, the difficulty of refusing lies. . . .

The upshot of it all was that he was elected to the Chairmanship at the opening of the first Session of 1911, and retained it, inevitably, until he resigned on the outbreak of war in 1914. He resigned the Secretaryship at the end of the year, and, at the Annual Conference of January, 1912, Henderson, who had long desired the post, for which indeed he was admirably suited, was elected in his place. Since the Secretaryship of the Labour Party carried with it that of the British Section of the Socialist International, and it seemed anomalous that its incumbent should himself not belong to a Socialist Society, Mr. Henderson joined the Fabians. . . . At this Conference of 1912 there was a presentation to the retiring Secretary. As for MacDonald, said Keir Hardie,

no words were required from any quarter to testify to his

¹ *The Leicester Pioneer*, the propaganda organ in his constituency.

value in connection with the Labour Party. As was written in St. Paul's Cathedral regarding Wren, "If you want his monument, look around. . . ." Many were the influences which went to the building up of a great Movement, but without the man to rally round no Movement recorded in history had ever found its way to success. . . . It would be sheer folly on his part to tell them of Mr. MacDonald's ability, of his tact, of his energy, and of his voracity for hard work. He could hit hard, but he could work hard; and it was for the work he had done that they were paying him this tribute of their respect. . . .

The gift was a pair of oil portraits of MacDonald and his wife by Solomon J. Solomon. For the recipient it was a particularly poignant choice.

* * * * *

Perhaps, though she lived a year and a half afterwards, Margaret MacDonald never recovered from the death of her little son, David, in February, 1910.

There are strange, mysteriously spun bonds of affection that entwine us to the dead and draw us away (wrote her husband). We live in a companionship of memories and ghosts. The world changes, the things of substance dissolve, the unseen claims us, and we go, and nothing can keep us back.

She was tired already, and this was a stunning blow.

"Last night," she wrote to a friend, "when over in the sitting-room, I left the door open as I always do when the children are at home, so as to hear them if they waken. I pretended he was there, and though I laughed at myself I humoured the fancy. I always say 'Good-morning' to his little spirit, too, in case he wants me."

She had been met too, on her return from India, by the news that her friend, Mary Middleton, was dying, and,

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although her own youngest child was born in December, 1910, and it was an hour and a half's journey to Clapham, she visited her almost daily until she died in April, 1911. And then "the will to live," wrote MacDonald, "seemed to go out of my wife." She had been sad when her husband became Chairman of the Party—it meant one more claim upon his time. For a while the old life continued. The Blue-Books and pinafores littered the tables; the endless committees were attended, the arduous, self-effacing social work went on. A friend who was much with the MacDonalds at this time wrote:

They used to start the day early. Generally Mrs. MacDonald walked before breakfast. The children went off to school by themselves at about eight-thirty. Mrs. MacDonald had innumerable committees and a constant stream of visitors. Some one would come in wanting introductions to Australian Labour people, or to Indians, and there would be unlimited pains taken. Or a beggar would turn up; they were as legion, and were never sent away, and very often an infinity of trouble was taken for them. She was extraordinarily good with simple people, and was entirely free from intellectual snobbery. There was a funny little German writer for whom she used to save the German Socialist papers. One of the most touching things at the funeral was to see him and a friend with a gorgeous red and white wreath which they had scraped together the money for. Their grief was pitiful.

On July 20, her forty-first birthday, she went to Leicester to investigate the management of industrial schools. Next morning there was a meeting of the Anglo-American Friendship Committee, and she lunched with her husband at the House, to meet a negro Professor. That afternoon, it was a Friday, they went down to their country cottage. She was too tired to walk. On Saturday it was obvious that she was seriously ill and

THE LIFE OF JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD

she was taken back to London. For six weeks she lay in bed, completely resigned and completely unafraid. She was entirely confident that death meant rejoining those she had loved—David, and Mrs. Middleton and her father. She had no wish to be visited by a clergyman. “That would be a waste of time,” she said, “I’m ready. Let’s speak of what has gone past. God has been very good to me.” In August, as the end drew near, the great railway strike had begun, MacDonald had to leave his wife’s sick bed to negotiate and confer, and once, owing to the paralysis of transport, ice, urgently needed for the patient, could be found nowhere in London save, after a long and desperate search, in the refreshment room of the House of Commons. On a Saturday at the end of August, W. C. Anderson, Mary MacArthur and J. J. Mallon, the present Warden of Toynbee Hall, feeling that something should be done to cheer MacDonald, rang up the flat at Lincoln’s Inn Fields to say that tomorrow they would hire a car and take him out for a drive. They drove round at the appointed hour, and after they had waited some while, MacDonald came out and, speaking with difficulty, said “I’m afraid Margaret’s dying,” turned round and went indoors again. They drove off without him. . . . With the coming of September hope had almost gone. MacDonald was one of those solitary spirits who must pass through the valley of shadows alone.

To J. Bruce Glasier.

3 Lincoln’s Inn Fields,
4th September, 1911.

MY DEAR BRUCE,

I am so sorry to hear you are ill but glad it is only a passing trouble of a day or two. Thank you very much for your kindly letter. I do not know what to do. Since last Sunday when she had a serious relapse my wife has been

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losing ground slowly but steadily, and the source of all the trouble has never ceased its virulence. This morning, I am somewhat buoyed up by the fact that she has not apparently become weaker within the last twenty-four hours, but such a slender thread supports her life now that the least strain may snap it in an instant. My way has been dark and hard. But do not think of coming up. We are both of those unfortunate people who sorrow alone. I know I have your most earnest thoughts. But there are some places we have to cross without the help of a hand except those we feel to be stretched out from afar. Surely if the desires of many will enable her to come back to us, she will live.

Yours always sincerely,

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

She died on September 8, 1911, and an inner light was extinguished in MacDonald's life for ever.

* * * * *

In a sense he was never altogether the same man again. The sensitiveness, the shyness, the spiritual aloofness, to which he had always been inclined, now grew upon him. It was not only that he had lost a companion who had possessed something like a genius for friendship, and had maintained a host of affectionate contacts with the outer world. Her influence, at once heartening, steadyng and soothing, had been precisely suited to his temperament, with its almost excessive sensitiveness, its unpredictable moments of inspiration, its moods of exultation and of discouragement. Almost every portrait of MacDonald suggests at first sight the artist rather than the statesman. His face, a strange combination of sensitiveness and determination, is a mirror of his life. Henceforth the artist in him was deprived of that intimate influence which had made the asperities of the world easier for him to put up with, and him easier for the world to understand.

To turn to her in stress and storm (he wrote, in his classic *Memoir* of his wife) was like going into a sheltered haven where waters were at rest, and smiling up into the face of Heaven. Weary and worn, buffeted and discouraged, thinking of giving up the thankless strife and returning to my own house and children and household shrines, I would flee with her to my Buckinghamshire home, and my lady would heal and soothe me with her cheery faith and steady conviction and send me forth to smite and be smitten.

Just before her death, she had suggested to him that he might write an account of their life and work together. The result was a little memoir issued for private circulation in 1911.

"It is so selfish of me to go," she said; "you will be alone. But if, when I go, I may plead to be allowed to be with you, I shall do that, and if in the silences of the night or of the hills you get consolation, say to yourself that it is I being with you." And then she said: "I will tell you what you might do. Write something about me before the veil of Time is drawn round me and you do not see me so well as you do now. The writing will help you, and perhaps you will turn to it sometimes and find me dwelling in it." I said I would. And so I am writing.

He finished it within three months of her death.

I am finishing this little tribute to her (it concludes) in that place (Lossiemouth) as I began it in the home where we first went together. I have just returned from a walk she loved to take at nightfall. The vast expanse of black sky was glittering with stars as when she and I walked together, and she talked of hope like a gem sparkling upon a background of despair; the sea was moaning as it did when she said, "Do not let us speak: let us walk silently, because then we speak most truly"; the weird call of the curlew, flying away into the night, came out of the darkness as it

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did when I first brought her here, and she shuddered and told me it made her wonder and wonder, and wonder what was in the heart of the Unknown and the Infinite.

The writing had helped him, as she had said it would. At first he had been plunged into the apathy of despair.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

The Hillocks,
Lossiemouth.

16th October, 1911.

I am very grateful to you for your letter of the ninth. I had to run up to London last week to meet the Insurance Bill Committee of the Party and went to Lincoln's Inn Fields. As though the unseen things thought I had not been quite sure, they howled at me from every nook and corner that she was dead and I was alone. . . . Tell Mrs. Unwin that I am to keep the girls with me. I hope to get a house-keeper who will look after them. I cannot write. A horrible reaction has come upon me since I was in London and if work will not give me peace I do not know what I shall do. Oh, if she could only come back and tell me if she knows about us all and cares about us all.

The small, privately-published memoir was a masterpiece. He was urged to expand and publish it to the world.

To J. Bruce Glasier.

Lossiemouth.
5th January, 1912.

. . . I do not know if you saw a notice of my little book which Richard Whiteing wrote in the *Daily News*. The result is a large number of letters asking for copies and urging publication. That of course is out of the question, but it has raised another matter. You perhaps know that some of her friends have been asking for a memoir and that I have been considering who should write it. Whiteing would have done it or Miss Corkran (whose things you know perhaps). But Whiteing and others urged me to do it

myself. I said "no," but some of these letters have influenced me and I am reconsidering the matter. I am not at all sure now but that it might be made an effective instrument in making some of the coming women think of their responsibilities and turn in our ways. That would be the best resurrection of my wife's life that I can think of and the idea takes hold of me. If I finally decide to carry it out, 1912 will be mortgaged, as I should like to finish it this year. What does your wife and yourself think of it? . . .

He decided to write, and *Margaret Ethel MacDonald, A Memoir*, was published before the end of 1912. It is perhaps the most moving tribute in our language from a husband to a wife. If MacDonald had not been a statesman, his book makes it evident that he might have been a writer of the first flight. It has been frequently quoted in these pages. No one who wishes to understand MacDonald can afford not to read it in full.

He settled slowly down into the life of a widower. He always enjoyed, and indeed needed, feminine society. Perhaps that was partly due to his upbringing. One of his colleagues has told me how surprised he was, when MacDonald left a Conference early, on the plea of an important engagement, to find that it was to take a cup of tea in a restaurant with a dowdy, middle-aged spinster. But he never seriously thought of marrying again. Nothing could replace what he had lost.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

N.D. (At Sea).

. . . I was glad you saw the children. I must try to keep from brooding over what has been, and from thinking of how different things are from what they would be under happier circumstances. The publication of the book seems to be a new closing down of the grave and at the same time a resurrection. I hope it may fulfil one of its purposes and help others on to the path which she pursued. I thought

your review read as though it had been cut about. It was jagged. B—— is far too fond of tampering with MSS. I have heard of others who have suffered at his hands, but in your case he ought to have left in every word. An article like that cannot bear the heavy hand of the alien pruner.

The domestic part of your letter is precious. My house-keeper seems to be making the children very happy and as for myself I have no thought of putting any one in the vacant place. She still does for me, and though I feel a kind of stranger in my own house, nothing can bring back the past and it is better to endure than try in vain to escape. She spoke to me, when she was dying, about the future in the way you say she spoke to you, but I have my work to do and if I can see the children growing up happy that will satisfy me and I shall wait patiently until I too go. If we are to meet and know each other again, it will be all the better—if we are not, I shall not regret in the end if I think of her alone. . . .

He never forgot her. In Lossiemouth he regularly visited her grave in the lonely cemetery at Spynie, making special pilgrimages on particular anniversaries. On his first arrival at Lossiemouth after becoming Prime Minister in the National Government, he was presented at the station with a bouquet of red roses. Four days later a young friend noticed them, beginning to wither, on his table, and asked if she should throw them away. "No," he said, "I have been meaning to take them to the cemetery." Her memory became a touchstone for achievements, a signpost for decisions in the years to come. Thus it must have counted much in determining his attitude in 1914, that he had seen the ugly aftermath of the war in South Africa—and seen it with her. And in the last talk I had with him, a few days before he died, he said, with some emotion, that if he had ever become a Conservative it would have been to trample on all his wife had ever stood for. After a

while, he secured the services of a capable and devoted Dutch lady as housekeeper; and during the war he moved from Lincoln's Inn Fields to 9 Howitt Road, Hampstead. His wife's sisters too, with whom the children spent much of their holidays, did much to help in bringing up the family. But he took his own new responsibilities very seriously. He wrote to his children regularly, whenever he was away from them. Often, when he was in the Chair, the work of a whole Committee would be held up while he telephoned home to inquire whether they were safely back from school. His own punctuality and precision was infused into the household. The Blue-Books were still there, but the meals were not so sketchy.

VIII

LEADER

1911-1914

QUITE apart from the personal grief which overshadowed it, 1911, MacDonald's first year of leadership, was a time of special and constant anxiety. It was the year of the international crisis over Agadir; it was also the year of the great strikes. The Osborne judgment and the Peers' veto had bred in the working classes a widespread sense of frustration, a growing impatience with Parliamentary forms. And the violence of the Suffragettes, the heady rumours of what was a-brewing in Ireland, had begun to suggest a dangerous alternative to the tedious method of persuasion. To this ferment was added the slow but steady rise in prices, the apparent impotence of Labour Representatives in Parliament and the contagion of French *syndicalisme révolutionnaire*, revolutionary trade unionism. It was characteristic that, on this side of the channel, this inflammatory label reappeared, meaninglessly, as "Syndicalism," merely, and that its philosophy, Georges Sorel's *Réflexions sur la Violence*, aroused little interest. But its central doctrines, that the trade union, not the state, is the germ of the future organisation of society, that direct industrial action is consequently preferable to Parliamentarism and that the class-war should be relentlessly prosecuted with every practicable variety of violence—were soon

being favourably canvassed by trade-union hotheads and study groups among the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge. Strange new phrases—lightning strike, stay-in strike, sabotage—were beginning to be heard. The unrest first showed itself in the latter half of 1910. The cotton industry, the boilermakers, the ironworkers, parts of the railways and the Welsh coalfields had all been involved before the end of the year. There was rioting and looting at Tonypandy. A new electricity was in the air. The trade union leaders were disregarded, or carried along by the ferment, despite themselves. In vain had Henderson warned the Trades Union Congress, that autumn, of the dangers of indiscipline. In the early summer of 1911 the unrest broke out again, with redoubled virulence. By the beginning of August, seamen and firemen (reputed the most docile and down-trodden of all workers), dockers, the London car men had all fought. At Liverpool there had been savage rioting among the Irish, troops had been called in and had opened fire. But all the strikes had been successful. The example was almost irresistible. On August 15, the four great railway unions decided to call their men out next day. There was a delay while the leaders met the Prime Minister, who knew, as they did not, that the country stood in almost hourly danger of war with Germany, but on the eighteenth the men were out, and industrial England was completely paralysed. Asquith handed over negotiation to Lloyd George, who called in the new leader of the Labour Party.

For three days MacDonald and his colleagues were almost continuously plunged in negotiation. It was a grievous week. At home, his wife was lying between life and death. The industrial situation was dark, complex and, for the leader of political Labour, danger-

ously charged with dynamite. He knew the dangers of the crisis then reaching its climax at Agadir, and the temptations of grave industrial trouble in Britain to the rulers of Germany. He did not like strikes. With Snowden and Henderson, he regarded them as a dangerous and irrational, though still an indispensable, weapon, only to be employed in the last resort. He hated the doctrine of direct action, and was very jealous of the reputation of Parliament. But he knew, too, how much, both by example and by neglect, the rulers of Britain had contributed to the present unrest. In Parliament on the 16th, while the railwaymen were waiting tensely for their meeting with the Prime Minister, he analysed the whole stormy situation in a speech of marked insight and balance. To few, probably, of the Conservatives who listened suspiciously to the arch-firebrand, as they thought him, did it occur that industrial order in the future would depend less upon police, troops and legislation than upon this man's hold over the discontented masses, and the long struggle which he was to wage against the dark doctrines of violence.

The disputes (he said) at the docks in London, in Manchester, and in Liverpool were not created ten days or a fortnight ago. That is a profound mistake. They are the result of an accumulation of resentment that has been going on for a considerable number of years. Those of us who have been in touch with those movements know how very difficult it has been for us to control certain forces that have been showing themselves on account of that accumulation of resentment.

He dealt with the effects of the Osborne judgment on the working man, who had come "to the conclusion that the hand of society is lifted up against him; and if

he lifts up his hand against society he is only giving what he has already received." He spoke of "the brutal, Byzantine display of vulgar wealth" in the West End, and its effect on men who were doing what they could to support their families on seventeen and eighteen shillings a week. "They are thrown back once more into themselves, and they fall into that immoral state of mind into which all men are driven when they find there is no helping hand outside and no real comradeship in their Society." Hours of work had been increased, wages, too often, had gone down, and rents up.

We deplore as much as you can deplore, and as much as any section of this House can deplore, all this unsettlement, and more especially its later development. But what is the use of doing that alone? You have to go into the causes; you have to trace those causes right the way back, and it is the duty of leading Members of this House not merely to get up and talk about law and order, but to see whether this House cannot do something to establish something like justice, so that these people may feel that the House is their custodian, and that the only time when they hear themselves talked about here with enthusiasm and energy is not when they have broken some policeman's head or some policeman has broken their head. . . .

I hope I have said nothing which will make peace difficult, but I will tell you what is the first thing which will make peace not only difficult but impossible, and that is that the men who feel they are in the right, and who themselves are deprecating this lawlessness, the genuine Trade Unionist —the one thing which will make him more bitter than ever and more opposed to reason and common sense, and to work in harness and under the control of the leaders, will be the sort of feeling that even here there is no case put up for him, and no statement made of the conditions under which he has had to live, and the state of mind which has been growing in him during the last six or seven years. As a matter of fact, a good, honest statement of the case for the men will do

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more to promote peace than all the silences and the carefully-balanced sentences which can be practised by the most skilful lawyer in this House.

All Saturday the negotiators sat round a green table in the room of the President of the Board of Trade. At a quarter-past eleven that hot summer night they shook hands in token of peace. Next day, addressing a demonstration of railwaymen in Hyde Park, MacDonald wound up characteristically by telling his audience to do their duty faithfully, to live soberly and to fear God.

The bulk of the I.L.P. regarded the terms of settlement as surrender. Glasier, and other close friends of MacDonald's, attacked them fiercely. But MacDonald had had no small share in the settlement, and he was prepared to defend it. It was the old difference. MacDonald was concerned with the practicable, some of his colleagues were not. None of the men's demands were conceded, said the critics. No, replied MacDonald (*in the Labour Leader*), but "the difficulty in settling a railway strike is that the men do not come out on one issue. Manchester is out for one reason, Liverpool for another, Sheffield for a third, Leicester for a fourth. . . . All that can be done in a national settlement is to provide machinery for local and sectional settlements." But the machinery had been provided, and it was the machinery of trade unionism, never before fully recognised on the railways. MacDonald was right; the settlement of 1911 was the stepping-stone to all the subsequent advances of the railwaymen—who afterwards officially thanked MacDonald and his two Labour colleagues "for their very painstaking and laborious efforts to bring about a settlement, feeling confident no better efforts could have been made." And in the debate on the following Tuesday, he added a timely protest against

the provocative use of troops by the Home Secretary, Mr. Winston Churchill.

We had discovered a secret which very few countries had hitherto discovered. The secret this nation had discovered was this—that the way to maintain law and order was through the ordinary operation of law-abiding and orderly public opinion. . . . If Mr. Churchill had just a little bit more knowledge of how to handle masses of men in these critical times, if he had a somewhat better instinct of what civil liberty did mean . . . there would have been much less difficulty during the last four or five days. . . . He had spoken plainly and he hoped it might induce the Home Secretary to think a little bit more before he drafted his troops where they were unwelcome and unbidden guests, and before he told his generals to do what they liked in Manchester or in Leicester he might consult people who knew something about those and other places and who knew how to keep order in them.

The unrest continued into 1912. In March came the first great miners' strike. It did at least induce the Government to pass a Minimum Wage Bill. The London dock strike, which followed in May, collapsed at the end of July. The men had endured much, and gained nothing. The miners' strike might claim to have been a partial success, the dockers' strike was a total failure. For the time being strikes went out of fashion. For the political leaders of Labour, and for MacDonald in particular, the two years of industrial upheaval had been a time of special anxiety and strain. In the Labour movement, industrial and political were so closely interlocked that any major industrial conflict inevitably involved the politicians, yet not so closely that the politicians could effectively influence the councils of the insurgents. They must defend, but they could not lead. Even if Syndicalism, with its cynical contempt for Parliament

and Parliamentarians, had not been in the air, the politicians might well have felt uneasy. This was not the steady disciplined world of Labour which they knew. In particular during the great heat of 1911—it was the hottest summer since 1868—there had been an ugly new temper abroad. What MacDonald could do, he did. He publicly expressed his sympathy with the sufferings of the strikers, and his sense of the justice of the aspirations which lay behind the revolt—a speech he made at Radcliffe, during the miners' strike, was denounced as a “mischievous and provocative utterance” by Liberal and Conservative newspapers which were just then applauding public criticisms of the miners' policy by Snowden and Barnes. He put their case to Parliament, stressing continually the responsibility of society and government for the industrial conditions in which the unrest had its roots. He advised them on Parliamentary tactics. He exhorted them to patience and discipline. He protested in Parliament against Churchill's troop movements, against the shootings, against Tom Mann's imprisonment for a pamphlet which urged soldiers not to fire on strikers. But his opinion—that the strike was a clumsy and costly weapon to be used only in the last resort—remained unaltered. Spent on Labour politics, one hundredth part of the cost, direct and indirect, of the two years' turbulence would have produced infinitely more tangible results. And the Syndicalist doctrines, which lay behind the strikes, filled him with concern for the future.

* * * * *

In the summer of 1911, too, Mr. Lloyd George's Health Insurance Bill provoked awkward divisions within the Labour Party. It was a contributory measure; besides the charge on State and employer, the wage-

earner must make his weekly contribution to the fund. MacDonald approved of this principle. Indeed, as he told the House, he had advocated a contributory scheme in an article written fifteen years earlier. A non-contributory Bill, he thought, would not be Socialism, but philanthropy. As he put it on the Second Reading of the Bill, "the Labour Members were not there for aids in wages, they were there for better wages." The Party as a whole followed MacDonald's lead. At a special Conference in June, although, with negligible exceptions, all the speakers were emphatically opposed to the contributory principle, the voting was 223 to 44 for MacDonald's view. "Mr. MacDonald," reported the *Labour Leader*, "had it all his own way." And this although a previous Conference, at Birmingham, had decided for no contributions. The Parliamentary Party also decided, by a majority, to accept this principle. But the minority, which included Snowden and Lansbury, refused to accept the majority decision, and vigorously attacked their colleagues on the platform and in the Press. A full-dress controversy between MacDonald and Snowden was waged in the columns of the *Labour Leader*. Snowden, as always, was bitter. He charged his opponent (and leader) with "untruthfulness" and "dishonesty", and spoke of "a tissue of mis-statements . . . clearly intended to throw dust in the eyes," a charge which, as the *Labour Leader*, which shared Snowden's views, pointed out, "will not be accepted by any one intimately acquainted with the man against whom it is directed." MacDonald stuck to his point pugnaciously, but politely.

I am a Socialist (he wrote in the *Labour Leader*); I am not a philanthropist, and I am not a Communist. . . .

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The Insurance Bill is Socialistic because it deals *both* with State and personal responsibility, and as a Socialist I am fighting to retain these features. "Ah, but," it is said, "here is a chance of showing we are more advanced than others. We want unearned increments for the whole nation. . . ." My reply is that State philanthropy is not more advanced than Socialism, and that to leave all one's moorings and mix up all one's ideas in order to pose as "advanced" is both dishonest and disastrous.

But his keen sense of discipline, and indeed of seemliness, was deeply offended by the public attacks of colleagues on the accepted policy of the Party, and by the spectacle of Labour Members answering each others' arguments, and trooping into opposite Lobbies, in the House. In one division on the Bill thirteen Labour Members voted one way, and sixteen the other. In seven out of twelve divisions in the week of July 17, Labour Members opposed each other. In one of them indeed MacDonald and two others voted against an amendment of Snowden's, which thirty-four of their own colleagues were supporting. These public dissensions were disagreeable, though unfortunately by no means novel. The established tendency of Labour Members to vote against the decisions of their own Party was, as we have seen, one of the reasons for MacDonald's reluctance to accept the Chairmanship. And Barnes, his outgoing predecessor, had protested, in the *Labour Leader*, not only against the decline in the attendance of Members but against their internal divisions. Something of this sort, no doubt, was in MacDonald's mind, when, after a year's experience of the leadership, he wrote somewhat dejectedly to Glasier.

THE LIFE OF JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD

To *J. Bruce Glasier.*

Lossiemouth.

5th Jan., 1912.

. . . I have had a restful time up here amongst the thinning company of old friends who are still with us, and with the shadows of memory. I have been going over old pathways and summing things up. As always they are good and bad. I am not a little unhappy about the outlook, chiefly—if something like a bull may be overlooked—owing to the paucity of able men coming up behind us. Our Parliamentary task is impossible under present circumstances and I am rather dreading the Easter Conference.¹ However we must go on—and that is not so easy as it was.

Partly, no doubt, as Hardie explained to the I.L.P. Conference of 1912, the dissensions in the Parliamentary group were due to the adhesion of the miners, for the Miners' Members were almost all, in fact, Liberals. But partly, too, it was due to the inescapable difficulties involved in supporting a Liberal Government. "Whenever a resolution tabled for introduction to the House was discussed by the Parliamentary Party," complained Snowden to the I.L.P. Conference of 1914, "it was scrutinised down to the minutest letter to see whether it could possibly be supported by the Tories and so endanger the existence of the Government." This was no doubt an exaggeration, but it seemed provokingly impossible for Labour to mark out a distinctive policy of its own. The irritation provoked by this constant dilemma reverberated through every Annual Conference and, even more resonantly, through the Annual Conferences of the I.L.P.

* * * * *

It was in the summer of 1913 that an unexpected incident in his own constituency of Leicester concentrated

¹ Of the I.L.P.



OFF TO COPENHAGEN FOR THE
INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST
CONGRESS, 1910

*Ramsay and Margaret MacDona.
with W. C. Robinson.*



WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE DEMONSTRATION, TRAFALGAR SQUARE, 1912

Keir Hardie, M.P., is speaking. Standing behind him from

this whole endemic controversy between the two rival conceptions of Labour strategy, and focussed it directly upon the personality and leadership of MacDonald. In June the Liberal Member for Leicester had announced his resignation. It was a two-member seat. At the last Election the figures had been:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| Crawshay Williams (Liberal) | 13,238 |
| MacDonald (Labour) . . . | 12,998 |
| Wilshire (Conservative) . . . | 7,547 |

MacDonald had already publicly announced that he did not—as Hyndman and his friends so often asserted that he did—owe his seat to an arrangement with the Liberals, and that, if the Liberals had any doubts on this point, they were welcome to put up two Liberals at the next Election, and see what would happen. Here, then, seemed an obvious opportunity to assert, and prove, the genuineness of Labour independence at Leicester, and, by implication, elsewhere. The local branch, though it moved tardily, was soon spoiling for a fight. But the Parliamentary Committee of the I.L.P., and the Executive Committee of the Labour Party refused to endorse a candidature. There was an immediate and bitter outcry. The implications of the refusal to fight seemed obvious. Recent by-elections had been humiliatingly unsuccessful. Hanley, for example, had been held by Enoch Edwards, a miners' representative, who had long been supported by the Liberal machine, with votes of 9,199 and 8,343 at the two elections of 1910. After his death, however, a by-election in July, 1912, had had to be fought against Liberal opposition. The Liberal was triumphantly returned, and the Labour candidate, who was bottom of the poll, received only 1,694 votes. Clearly, said the

critics, our independence, as we have always maintained, is a sham. MacDonald, who dominates both the I.L.P. Parliamentary Committee and the Labour Executive, will not risk a by-election in Leicester, because it would expose to the world Labour's subservience in his own constituency; did not the I.L.P. National Administrative Council, of which MacDonald is not a member, actually approve the demand for a contest? Battle was soon joined in the columns of the *Labour Leader*, and it illumined the whole case for and against what may perhaps be called MacDonaldism. So consistent indeed was MacDonald's career to be that, *mutatis mutandis*, the same arguments, both for and against, might have been employed at any time in the next twenty years, and the tussles with the Clydeside group in 1924 or 1929 would be but an echo of the controversy of 1913. Snowden, at this time temporarily hot for thoroughgoing, class-conscious independence-and-damn-the-consequences, wrote bluntly that

if the Labour Party Executive had endorsed a second Labour candidate for Leicester, it would have jeopardised the seats of four-fifths of the present Labour Members. It is no use putting forward every reason except the true one. The present Labour representation in Parliament is there mainly by the good-will of the Liberals, and it will disappear when that goodwill is turned into active resentment.¹

Branches then conducting a special propaganda campaign, to commemorate the coming of age of the I.L.P., wrote that their enthusiasm could not survive this fresh humiliation. Dr. Salter announced that Bermondsey would send no affiliation fees to the Head Office that month. But MacDonald proceeded to defend both the abstention at Leicester, and, on a wider front, the whole

¹*Labour Leader*, June 28th, 1913.

strategy for which he, more than any one, was responsible. They had reached a stage, he pointed out, at which merely propagandist and experimental candidatures were no longer necessary.

As for Leicester,

The situation in Leicester is still that neither the Liberal nor the Labour Party can get both the seats, but that each of them can get one. To do this there is no alliance, no agreement and no understanding. . . . "But," it is said, "that means that we owe our seat to the Liberal Party." We do nothing of the kind. . . . The fact is that owing to our strength in localities and in the whole country, the political circumstances of Liberalism are such that it must stand aside, whether it likes it or not, and allow us to hold a certain number of seats. . . . So far as I am concerned I have no fears for the result in Leicester if the Liberal Association were to run two candidates; I should still remain one of the Members for Leicester. . . . The Labour Party in Leicester is therefore as independent of the Liberal Party and as free of alliance with it as it is in any town in the country, and the considerations with which I am dealing . . . I can state as an undeniable fact, had no more influence upon the conclusions to which my colleagues and myself came that we should not fight at Leicester, than that the election did not take place in a full moon or that it was held in the month of June.

He went on to defend himself against the wider implications behind the attacks of his critics. The Party, he maintained, was in no sense subservient to the Liberals; indeed "the colour of the Government, so far as we are concerned, is purely accidental." But the Government had certain measures in hand which only they could complete, and which must be cleared out of the way before another Election came, if the work of the last two years was not to run to waste. Moreover, these were

measures of which Labour Conferences had repeatedly expressed approval.

It is grossly unfair for a minority to blame us for carrying out the mandates of previous conferences and censure us because we assume that pledges which we gave to our constituencies on the strength of these votes, ought to be carried out. They have no business to instruct us one year to undertake responsibilities and abandon us in a month or two because we are obeying their previous behests.

But he recognised that behind the irritation over Leicester, behind the charge of subservience in Parliament lay a vaguer and more far-reaching complaint—the sense that, as he put it, “the movement in the country requires more red meat.” He admitted that the impatient had a case. But to him the issue was fundamental; it was the issue which, in one form or another, was to confront him at every stage in his career—did the Party want results, or would it be content with the sentimental satisfaction of minatory gestures? MacDonaldism demanded patience; without patience, the Party was doomed.

Are we incapable of sitting down and devising a method of fighting which will be complete, not in every vote given in the House of Commons, and not in every election, but over a series of years? . . . Are we capable of saying, for instance, “we will not fight Leicester because we are not ready to take the second seat” or “we shall use the Parliament Act not because we support Sir Edward Grey’s foreign policy, but because, taking in the mass the circumstances which we have to face in the year of Grace 1913, and keeping in mind the political conditions which we desire to reach in 1914 and 1915, the best policy which we can adopt now is to secure the effectiveness of the Parliament Act, whilst we attack the details to which we object.” That is fighting; that is advancing the Party and the movement. . . . If

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the Party in the country cannot do that, there is an unbridgeable gulf between Parliamentary work and constituency work, and no man ever born will be able to unite the two. . . . It is for the Party to decide whether it can tolerate disciplined action and long views, and, when it has decided, it must take steps to protect those who are carrying out its decisions.¹

In later articles, MacDonald maintained that his strategy was "laying a reliable and solid foundation for Labour power in the future" and that it had "the support of the vast majority of the Labour Party not only inside the House of Commons, but outside it." It lay in the nature of things that they should be suspected of subservience to the Liberals. Whatever they did, that suspicion would endure. With every new by-election, they were told, fight Crewe, fight Midlothian and clear yourselves of it. They fought, but suspicion always revived. And, after all, they were but following the example of every Socialist Party on the Continent.

To-day in Holland, the Socialist leader, after dining with the Queen, is considering with his friends whether he should join the Ministry that is being formed. I am told that three portfolios have been offered to the Party in the new Ministry. The chances are they will not be accepted, but whether they are or not, Troelstra will keep the Ministry in office, bargaining with it about programmes, and when unable to get all he wants he will have to balance up, from his own Socialist point of view, the value of a vote given in support of an imperfect Ministry as opposed to one which would be an assistance to a still more imperfect Opposition.²

The critics were not appeased. Even Keir Hardie, who had been abroad, though he was clear that Labour in Parliament was not the prisoner of the Liberals, thought

¹ *Labour Leader*, July 3rd, 1913.

² *Labour Leader*, July 17th, 1913.

that Leicester should have been fought. Snowden returned to the charge with a passionate plea for complete independence, even if it should cost every Labour seat in Parliament. Obscurer critics ventilated their impatience, brought charges of bad faith or asked why Mr. Parker, the Labour Representative on the Commission which investigated the charges against Liberal Ministers who had purchased Marconi shares, had not produced a Minority Report. But the Party Conference, in January, 1914, vindicated MacDonald's claim that the majority was with him. The critics were noticeably less vocal; courageously seconded by Henderson, MacDonald overwhelmed them. At the I.L.P. Conference in April, it is true, a resolution, carried after MacDonald had left for London, urged the Parliamentary Labour Party to ignore the effect of its votes on the Government of the day. But in such matters it was the Labour Party, not the I.L.P., which counted.

The whole episode, which reveals MacDonald at his most characteristic, had still, in new settings and with a changing caste, often to be re-enacted. But each revival of the familiar controversy would mark a new stage in the education of the Party. It would be found, for example, that the challenge to MacDonald as Prime Minister came from a small group of young, new Members. No responsible leaders backed them. The Party as a whole had learnt its lesson. Once the supreme test of the first post-war years was over, it stood overwhelmingly behind MacDonald. His opponents had judged the temper of their fellow countrymen less shrewdly than he; nor was any of them personally so well equipped to command the allegiance of the rank and file. But, more than this, MacDonald's policy was founded firm upon the fundamentals of his political

epoch. For the doctrines of Collectivism were rooting themselves, slowly but surely, in both the older Parties. Liberalism—hence its virtual eclipse after Gladstone's last great Ministry fell in 1874—had resisted longest, but Lloyd George's Insurance Acts marked the breaching of its inmost citadel. Henceforth the Liberals too moved towards Collectivism, and moved all the faster for Labour pressure. As MacDonald put it in 1911, in a review of Professor Hobhouse's *Liberalism*, "what he really means by Liberalism is the action into which the pressure of Socialist thought will drive every political Party which pretends to be democratic, and the philosophising which that action will call for in its defence." Accordingly, MacDonald's "responsible independence," as he called it, his conditional support, that is, to Liberal administrations, yielded satisfactory results, for the simple reason that Collectivist doctrines were now common to both Parties. "Our support for the Government," as he said in the debate on the Address in February, 1911, "is going to be, not for the Government as a Government, but for the measures which the Government produce." Yet, if this characteristic episode revealed much of MacDonald's strength, a shrewd observer of it might perhaps have detected a joint in his armour too. For though MacDonald's artistic temperament was the source of some of his greatest triumphs, it meant too that he was easily depressed, painfully sensitive to criticism, and sometimes over-apt to detect hostility, incompetence, or even disloyalty, among his colleagues. Thus the criticism which sprang out of the Leicester episode goaded him to exclaim, in the columns of the *Labour Leader*:

In no other walk of life are colleagues submitted to such heart-breaking injustice. This kind of thing wears down,

in the end, every good conviction, and turns into a bitter cynicism every particle of idealism which starts one on the road to Socialism.

Nor did he spare the Party itself. "Over and over again," he wrote, "when we can strike, we see our forces disorganised, squabbling, sulky. . . . What leader, what committee can give the best that is in them to such a Party?" A more placid leader would have disguised both his discouragement and his resentment; would even perhaps have felt neither. But then a more placid leader could not have gripped the rank and file as MacDonald gripped them.

In all these dissensions both the special difficulty and the special strength of MacDonald's position sprang from the peculiar composition of the pre-war Labour Party. After all, of its forty Members of Parliament only about half a dozen openly labelled themselves Socialist (and even they had never stood for Parliament as such) while the majority were first and foremost trade unionists, and several of the Miners were, more or less undisguisedly, still Liberals. It is true that these distinctions were largely perhaps a matter of *labels*, and that between the most impatient of the I.L.P.ers and the most inveterately Liberal of the Miners' Members there was always the bridge of the Collectivism now increasingly common to both Parties. Nevertheless labels will often stir men to greater rancour than the profoundest spiritual and intellectual differences, and the heterogeneous character of his following, the alacrity with which they voted against each other in the lobbies, was undoubtedly one of MacDonald's major difficulties at this time. On the other hand, there was undoubtedly a sense in which it was the basis of his personal hold over the Party. For as Chairman, MacDonald

now occupied a clearly-defined and solitary central position in the Party. He was an evolutionary Socialist, one of the small Leftward minority of I.L.P. Members of Parliament, and as such, as we have seen, virtually ineligible for the Chairmanship during the first two or three years of the Party's existence. But once in the Chair, his realism, his shrewd judgment, his impatience with mere "phraseology" inevitably brought him into conflict with the Left wing of his colleagues, and taught the once suspicious majority to trust him as a bulwark against imprudence and impetuosity. After the Leicester controversy, towards the end of 1913, he had thoughts of resigning the Chairmanship, but he was persuaded to continue, and in announcing his willingness to serve again, the *Labour Leader*, mouthpiece of the Left, revealed its sense of the tactical factors which made MacDonald *l'homme nécessaire*. "Mr. MacDonald," it said, "can best maintain the unity of the Party as it is now constituted." He had, in fact, come into his own. He was a moderate.

In this now inevitably central position MacDonald remained nevertheless unshakably an evolutionary Socialist. His business, as he saw it, was not to make the maximum number of Socialist gestures, but to extract as much Collectivist legislation as possible out of the political situation of the moment. At no time, in fact, would he have dissented from what he had said to the I.L.P. Conference of 1911.

We have been told that we do not raise Socialism in the House of Commons, and that if our Members in the country could only open their newspapers one morning and read of a full-dress debate on Socialism they would be pleased. I do not know if I am differently constituted from other people, but if I found that our representatives in the House of Commons tried to appeal to me as an outsider by making

propaganda speeches in the House of Commons, I should be far more disgusted than pleased. The great function of the House of Commons is to translate into legislation the Socialism that is preached in the country, and to make it effective in the law of the land.

In nine speeches out of ten made by Labour Members, he claimed, "Socialism was implicit. The leadership given to the Labour Party could never have been given unless it had been inspired by the principles of Socialism." Nine speeches out of ten will probably appear, to a modern student of those pre-war Hansards, to be a somewhat exaggerated estimate. But he would have to make allowance for a curious contrast in the political atmosphere of those days. Since then, all Parties have moved to the Left. Views which were shocking when held by Labour Members then, are the commonplaces of all Parties to-day; while Socialists could then sometimes express opinions which Conservatives would hardly venture to utter to-day. It was, for example, MacDonald, as leader of the Labour Party, who said, on the Insurance Bill (May 4, 1911), that

if that particular part of the working-class forces which was more subject to unemployment than the other was to be insured at the same rate, then the State was entitled to lay down certain conditions under which the unemployment benefits would be paid. He did not see why a condition of training, why some educational condition should not be imposed as a condition of the receiving of this benefit. It would be an enormous gain to the State and to the people themselves, if the period of unemployment (particularly if it were a substantial period) could be utilised.

Nothing had shaken MacDonald's belief in the evolutionary character of Socialism. Perhaps nowhere had he been more sharply confronted with the dilemma

which every evolutionary must face, than in a public debate in which he engaged with Hilaire Belloc in the Memorial Hall, in May, 1911. Modern Collectivists, said Belloc, were in fact engaged in establishing, not Socialism but the Servile State, a Society, that is, in which the proletariat lives, comfortable and contented, under the dictatorship of private monopoly. After seventy years of Socialist propaganda, they had not advanced one step towards confiscation, and were as far as ever from public ownership of the means of production. "Collectivism can only come through the barricade; not through the politician." This was of course a view which was, more or less openly, shared by most Syndicalists, and even by some of MacDonald's more impatient followers, and he met it by an unflinching statement of the evolutionary faith. It was unfair and unscientific, he pointed out, to judge an evolutionary process by examining it at any one point. We were in fact manifestly evolving from one stage of economic organisation to another. Capital was massing into larger aggregates, and production was becoming increasingly co-operative. Distribution, it was true, was still individualistic, but in various ways—through taxation, for example—capital was being confiscated. And even if at the moment the economic security of the wage earner was increasing more rapidly than the destruction of private monopoly, this did not, as Belloc supposed, portend the servile state, for in fact increasing prosperity nourished, rather than extinguished, the insurgent instincts of the wage-earner. It was the slum-dwellers who were "the best instruments of reaction."

In 1911 MacDonald published *The Socialist Movement*, his most comprehensive statement of evolutionary Socialism. Appearing in the new Home University

Series, it was an attempt to commend the Socialist case to the widest possible public. After a historical survey, and a critical exposure of the defects of individualistic capitalism, the author is at some pains to explain what, in his view, Socialism is *not*. It is, for one thing, not revolution. Revolution and evolutionary, organic change are altogether incompatible. Revolution can only effect superficial change—from monarchy to republic, for example. To talk of “revolutionary Socialism” is therefore to “keep up an honoured but antiquated phraseology.” By “revolutionary Socialism” Socialists mean merely that “when Socialism has come the change will be so great as to be fundamental.” Even so, the use of such language is to be deplored, and Socialists who use it “only add to the difficulties of those who are trying to understand them.” For revolution, in fact, “does not mean a big change, but a sudden and violent change,” which is precisely what, in his view, the organic process of evolutionary Socialism could never be. The Parliamentary method, he explains, admirably suits the Socialist, because his technique is necessarily scientific, experimental. That is why Socialists in a responsible Parliament, such as the British, unlike the Social Democrats in Germany, where the Reichstag was in effect little more than a debating chamber, must needs “pay far more attention to . . . immediate programmes than to abstract principles, though they must find principles necessary as the mould in which to fashion programmes.” Their eyes are necessarily fixed not upon the horizon, but upon the next step. And, remembering, no doubt, many a controversial Annual Conference, he added, “they will be far less able to take purely negative attitudes, and they will have far fewer opportunities to vote on separate measures without reference

to the complete work of Sessions and to the governments that are in power." Since his method is thus experimental, and his attention concentrated upon the immediate future, it follows that the evolutionary Socialist is to some extent dispensed, and indeed precluded, from detailed analysis of a projected Socialist Commonwealth. The new Commonwealth will arrive, step by step. The flower unfolds petal by petal, but, until it has unfolded, we are not to foresee its precise contours—which will depend upon organic natural processes, partly beyond our control. There are to be no miraculous Monday mornings. "The problems will be solved as they arise." And so the itch to catalogue in advance every by-way in the New Jerusalem, and indeed every sub-committee among its possibly as yet unborn inhabitants, is a survival from the era of Utopian Socialism. And consequently MacDonald deals here even more attentively with what Socialism is not, than with what it is. It is not, for example, class-war; those who speak that language "are like those more backward religious communities which express their theologies in the terms used before there was a science of geology." MacDonald's view of the class-war, it should be noted, was warmly endorsed by Keir Hardie. "When I used the expression 'communal consciousness' for the first time . . ." wrote MacDonald, in his preface to Stewart's *Life of Keir Hardie*, "as the antithesis to 'class-consciousness,' which some Socialists regarded as the shibboleth test of rectitude, he wrote me saying that that was exactly what he felt."

He does not, however, omit positive and constructive suggestions. He discusses the transference of private property into public control, without confiscation, the "right to work," workshop management, and the

prospects of ability, of art, and of minorities in a Socialist State. It is far from being a street-plan of the New Jerusalem; but it is excellently designed to enable the public to see his own evolutionary faith in reasonable perspective, and to dispel some of the grosser illusions, bred from the language of more violent and less scientific advocates.

The fact remains that by the outbreak of the war, save for its absorption of the miners, Labour had made no substantial electoral advance since the day when, in 1900, it had first become a Party. During the last three years by-election after by-election had ended in humiliating defeat. The sales of the Party's publications had declined. Even the I.L.P., the propagandist spearhead of the whole movement, was beginning to lose ground. At the beginning of 1909, there had been 100 I.L.P. branches in Lancashire; in May, 1911, there were only 87. MacDonald himself, and, to a lesser degree, Snowden and Hardie had made an impression upon the public imagination, but to the man in the street the Party as a whole was now a not very interesting or alarming appendage of the Liberals. Upon the Liberals, too, it still depended, to an ill-defined but obviously considerable degree, for any substantial Parliamentary representation. It certainly looked as though Lloyd George's deliberate attempt to outbid Labour with the masses had been successful. Partly, no doubt, the comparative failure of the new Party had been due to the sudden spread of the anti-Parliamentary virus, of which the varied symptoms were the great strikes, suffragette militancy and the Ulster impasse. Partly, too, to the inevitable difficulties of any third Party under a two-Party system; to have perpetually to choose between what their opponents' superior numbers inevitably made either a

Liberal or a Conservative lobby was an additional handicap to a Party whose very *raison d'être* was independence. But the ultimate reason for the failure to progress, which contrasts so startlingly with the record of the ten years after the war, was the fact that Labour had remained a Party of one class. Not until a new and wider constitution had made it a national Party, admitting to its ranks (and, out of all proportion to their numbers, as its Parliamentary representatives) men and women of all classes, did Labour begin to record rapid advances. It was thus the war which was the making of the Labour Party, for it was the war which split Liberalism by the Coalition, and, through MacDonald's alliance with the Liberal semi-pacifists in the Union of Democratic Control and elsewhere, prepared the way for the widening of the Party's constitution and the sudden accession of Liberal recruits in the first post-war years.

* * * * *

But by now the sinister shadow of Europe was beginning to lengthen once more across the domestic controversies of Britain. During the last three years before the storm burst, MacDonald was paying steadily increasing attention to foreign affairs. As early as 1910, during his visit to Germany, he had delivered a speech in the Reichstag on Anglo-German relations, which had much impressed the Chancellor, von Bethmann Hollweg. Again and again, at home and abroad, during these last three years of the old world, MacDonald sounded a warning note, or pleaded for better international understanding. On the German spectre he concentrated steadily, and on the Anglo-German rivalry in naval armaments which it provoked. In the first debate in which he spoke as

Chairman of the Party, in February, 1911, he had uttered a warning. The words to-day have a singularly topical ring.

First of all we must cease all those irritating and pettifogging criticisms regarding German economic advance. Germany is going to increase her markets, Germany is going to increase her trade and commerce. Germany is going to be a more and more effective competitor with us in the world's market. We had better in a scientific and calm frame of mind regard that, than constantly lose our heads, lose our tempers, and very often throw our common sense behind us and engage in foolish, windy and cant phrases about Germany being the enemy. In the second place, we have to make up our minds to come to a closer political understanding with Germany regarding certain outstanding questions, like, for instance, Germany's position, both political and economic, in Asia Minor. As a matter of fact, the sooner we deliberately sit down and consider the relative positions, economical and political, of Germany and ourselves in the world the nearer we shall come to that state of public opinion, both in Germany and in England, which will enable a real entente between these two countries to be accomplished, which will be the signal of a very substantial reduction of armaments, and the beginning of a new policy altogether.

For himself, he was determined to understand the potential enemy as thoroughly as he could. With Labour and Socialist Germany he already had his contacts. But Labour and Socialist Germany was far, after all, from being the whole of Germany. And in the early summer of 1911 a curious incident resulted from his determination to know all the Germanies with which he could make contact. During a visit to England that year, the Kaiser lunched with Lord Haldane at his house in Queen Anne's Gate. He had let his host know that he would like to meet some distinguished men whom he

might not otherwise encounter, and Haldane asked, besides Kitchener, Curzon and Morley, MacDonald, Edmund Gosse, Spender, Lord Moulton and others. MacDonald accepted, and there was an immediate splutter of protests from the I.L.P.

As so often happened, the critics were at cross-purposes with MacDonald primarily because he and they held entirely different conceptions of the rôle of a Socialist leader. To them, all Socialists were primarily propagandists, preachers of a new political gospel and a new political morality, and for a Socialist leader to lunch with the Emperor of Germany appeared as shocking as if a Nonconformist Minister had taken the chair at a beanfeast of licensed victuallers and bookies. To MacDonald, on the other hand, though on the platform, in one of their dual rôles, they were undoubtedly propagandists, his Parliamentary colleagues and himself were at least as obviously serious politicians, whose business was to train themselves as the Cabinet Ministers of the future, and for whom accordingly it was both natural and proper to accept an opportunity of learning something at first hand of the reputedly despotic ruler of Germany. Nor was it, this time, only the old conflict of responsibility against irresponsibility; it was also the newer conflict of the too rigid democrat—part genuine Puritan, part inverted Pharisee—who draws his skirts aside, on principle, from the polluting presence of the rich and powerful, against the less self-conscious humanist who is always prepared to learn—even from an emperor. MacDonald himself was fundamentally a Puritan—it was eleven years after this date that he expressed anxiety to me at his son's striking up a friendship with a young man who owned a car—but he was never a Pharisee. And the æsthete and the traditionalist

in him could always enjoy stately circumstance, and revere ancient ceremony. He was perfectly outspoken on these matters. He refused, this summer, to keep a speaking engagement with an I.L.P. Branch at Dumfries, which, without ceasing to clamour for his services, had just censured him for "lunching with the Kaiser." He would teach them, he said, to mind their own business. The affair had admittedly been delicate, and in various forms it would frequently recur. Some weaker brethren would no doubt be (in the biblical sense) offended by MacDonald's conduct. But perhaps as sound a verdict as any delivered, then or on similar episodes later, was that of the editor of the *Socialist Review*, who wrote, in July, 1911,

As Socialism gains in strength, its leaders will gain in influence in circles outside Socialism. They will be brought into touch with the world. . . . The official heads of our movement cannot remain isolated on their pinnacles like a glacier-borne boulder on the top of a mountain. Their friends may prescribe this isolation for them, but it is an unnatural and an impossible position. . . . If it be true that the Socialist who speaks to Kings ceases to be a Socialist, that is to be the most serious obstacle in the way of the Socialist advance, because many Socialists will speak to Kings.

In July, Europe trembled on the brink of general war, and MacDonald's conduct, which was irreproachably statesmanlike, casts forward a curiously revealing light upon his behaviour in the darker crisis of 1914. The French, it may be remembered, had sent troops to Fez, whose Sultan was threatened by a Pretender, ostensibly to protect the European residents, but presumably not without less disinterested designs, and in apparent contravention of the Algeciras Conference agreement.

Germany demanded compensation, and sent the *Panther* to a Moroccan port, Agadir, as earnest of her intentions. The British Government could not overlook either the threat to France, whom, in Moroccan affairs, we were under a formal obligation to support, or the prospect of a new German naval base on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. On July 4, the German ambassador was warned of our serious concern. On July 21, the German Government had still vouchsafed no reply, and on that evening, speaking at the Mansion House, Lloyd George, with the approval of Asquith and Grey, but without consultation with the rest of the Cabinet, uttered the gravest of warnings. If German policy, he said, meant ignoring British interests and treating Britain as if it were of no account "then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure." Coming from the leader, as he then was, of the pacifist¹ wing of the Liberals, these words startled Europe and, which was more to the purpose, Germany. German demands were lowered, and the war clouds slowly dispersed. MacDonald's comments on this episode, in a speech in the House on July 27, subsequently amplified to a Scottish Labour Conference at Edinburgh on August 5, are clear-cut and revealing. He emphasised the potential influence for peace of the Labour and Socialist Parties of Europe.

The House also knows perfectly well the forces, the organisations and the movements in Europe with which we are associated. The House knows perfectly well that so long as there are Labour Parties in France, Germany or England these Parties will co-operate to the last moment to seek peace and to pursue it earnestly. . . . If the barque of peace

¹ This word, which is used for convenience, is, strictly speaking, an anachronism in 1911.

is going to be wrecked at the present moment we shall stand by it, *even when it has been wrecked.*

In the words I have italicised, there is an evident forecast, which went unnoticed at the time, of his attitude in 1914. But, taken by themselves, they would misrepresent MacDonald, both in 1911 and 1914. When he spoke of standing by the ship of peace, even if it should have been wrecked, he meant precisely what he said. In 1911, as in 1914, he was not thinking of dividing the nation, if war should come, by an anti-war campaign, but of continuing, even if war did come, to think and plan for the eventual peace. A war would be wrong and must be avoided, if possible; if it came, it must be as short as possible. But, if it came, it must be won. The distinction between this position and what later came to be loosely described as pacifism is narrow. But it is an essential distinction, and MacDonald did his best to make it clear to the House.

I do hope and I do pray that no European nation will assume for a single moment that party divisions in this country will weaken the national spirit or national unity. But that does not mean that there will not be sections in the country that will strive ceaselessly night and day, in season and out of season, whether it is popular or unpopular, to make it impossible first of all, and to make it difficult after that, for two civilised countries, two professedly Christian countries, to resort to the arbitrament of the sword in order to settle a difficulty that could easily be settled by the Hague Conference.

The warning, obviously addressed to Germany, that party divisions would not weaken or divide the nation was both timely and courageous. As he subsequently explained, he had received private warnings, from both

British and German sources, that the situation was critical. In Britain the railway crisis¹ was at its height, and might well have encouraged the rulers of Germany to greater intransigence. But MacDonald was naturally taken to task, by some Socialist critics, for having ventured to speak of national unity, and at Edinburgh he explained his motives frankly.

If there was any sort of feeling in the mind of, say, the German Foreign Minister that he could play with fire and be safe because there would be hampering influences in this country, he (MacDonald) had to say something which did not encourage the Minister in that particular game.

Throughout, his eminently practical object was at one and the same time to warn Germany that she must not count on British weakness, and to maintain the peace efforts in both countries. Thus he took strong exception to Lloyd George's Mansion House speech, precisely because, though a blunt warning to Germany was admittedly necessary, and from so well-known an anti-war man the warning undoubtedly came with special force, the fact remained that, if the Prime Minister had been the speaker, he could have warned the warmongers in Germany without discouraging the advocates of peace. The effect of the words having come from a reputed pacifist, said MacDonald

was to discourage the activities of peace organisations and peace forces in Germany. Mr. Asquith was associated with the Liberal Imperialist wing, and the statement made by him would undoubtedly have warned the Prussian bureaucracy that there was danger ahead without having paralysed the peace forces.

Henceforth, until the twelfth hour had struck,

¹ See p. 212 foll. *supra*.

MacDonald did all he could to improve relations between the two countries. He was only too well aware how little there was that could be done. He could protest, of course, against Grey's policy, and very notably against its secrecy. For already he was suspicious that we had accepted more obligations than the public had been permitted to hear of.

He felt certain (he said in the House on November 21, 1911) that if the nation spoke, if public opinion could be concentrated at the present moment in the voice of one man addressing the House of Commons, the references to Germany would be more cordial than the references of Sir Edward Grey. . . .

It was difficult, however, to understand what the general point of view of the Foreign Office was. It was said that this country was to continue her friendship with France and with Russia. Why? What was the friendship? What were the obligations? . . . Moreover, in regard to Persia, how far were England's relations with Russia going to carry her? Sir Edward Grey had said that there were no secret treaties or obligations of any kind whatever. The present position of affairs in Persia justified the suspicion that there was an understanding with Russia that went much further than anything published hitherto. . . . In view of all that had taken place since the middle of June he thought it about time for the House of Commons to insist upon knowing more about foreign affairs than hitherto.

The plea for open, or at least for more open, diplomacy was prescient and timely. But on the general tenor of the Government's policy criticism spent itself in vain. And, in his pleas for a more friendly tone towards Germany, it is likely that MacDonald did not allow sufficiently, as the Government needs must, for Germany's now fixed determination to pursue her own ends at whatever cost. He could protest, too, against the quick-

ening tempo of the armaments race—as when, in debate on March 2, 1914, he charged Churchill, at the Admiralty, with being a puppet of the armament rings. Here too, however, he may not have made sufficient allowance for the obligations of a Government which was only too well aware of the extent of German preparations. More hopeful was the attempt to build upon the friendly relations still subsisting between the Labour and Socialist organisations in the two countries. How slight was the influence of Socialist organisations in Europe, he was only too well aware. They could not, perhaps, prevent a bellicose Government from going to war, but they could at least give valuable assistance to a pacific Government in keeping out of it. “We know” (MacDonald had said in the House) “that those who work with us on the Continent cannot control Continental international policy. But we know that it may be useful to the rulers of all countries to know that there is a strong organisation that will stand for peace through fair weather and foul weather.” And during these last years of mounting tension, he worked incessantly to cultivate the one oasis of international understanding to which he had access. As usual, he was severely practical. Germany was the danger point, and it was among the democratic forces in Germany accordingly that he, and the British Labour movement with him, must extend their friendly contacts. For he had already tasted the futility of the variously designated Committees and Conferences, at which the same worthy British citizens repeatedly assembled, to criticise their Government and proclaim their own undying affection for peace. Such domestic gatherings had, no doubt, their uses, and from time to time it was his business to attend them. But, as he frankly reported to the Party, after taking the chair at

a Conference of the National Peace Council in May, 1912, "the difficulty these Congresses have to face is that they are being attended by the same men and women, and are compelled to consider old subjects upon which only old speeches can be made." There was at least more practical work than that to be done—even at home. Thus in July, 1911, he was entertaining a delegation of German working men at Leicester—it was during the tension over Agadir, and not long after he had got into trouble for making the acquaintance of the Kaiser. And always there were his multifarious foreign contacts. He was personally acquainted with the Socialist and Labour leaders of almost every country in the world. Ever since his marriage he had made a habit of foreign travel, and, wherever he went, he had made it his business to learn to know those men who, like himself, might be governing their respective countries within a couple of decades. Jaurès, Bebel, Vandervelde, Troelstra, MacDonald—if, one day, half Europe was governed by Socialists, already linked by the International, there would be little fear, he believed, of war. But supposing war came too soon for them? All he could do was to maintain and, if possible, enlarge these international contacts. He corresponded anxiously with German Social Democrats. In September, 1912, he was in Germany with a party of Labour Members and their friends, on a visit which he described, in a speech at Munich, as "a pilgrimage for knowledge and a crusade for peace." Two months later he was addressing a great gathering in Paris. In December he started on his second journey to India—Lord Morley, with whom he was on cordial terms, had persuaded him to join the Commission which was going out to investigate the Indian Civil Service, and in particular its recruitment and conditions

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of service, and the extent to which Indians were admitted to it. This was an important but, in comparison to the area surveyed by MacDonald's *Awakening of India*, a comparatively limited field. The Commission, which included Lord Ronaldshay (now Marquis of Zetland and Secretary of State for India) and Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, did not report till 1915. The report¹ was practical but technical, and is not of any particular interest now. MacDonald signed it, with a two and a half-page minute of reservations, principally concerned with the methods of recruiting Indians to the Service. What he had learnt in this second, and official, visit to India is embodied in his book, *The Government of India*, which, owing to the war, did not appear till 1919, and to which I shall have to refer when dealing with the Indian policy of his premiership.

He did not set out in the best of spirits. His health had been indifferent for some while; the immediate prospects, both of the Labour Party and of European peace, were obscure; and the departure revived poignant memories of how he had set sail for India with his wife only three years earlier, on the last journey they were to make together.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

N.D. (December, 1912).

We are somewhere off the coast of Italy about level with Naples on a summer sea and under a summer sky. There is a gracious change in the air and I am already feeling more alive. I have a pleasant "stable companion"—a captain going out to join his regiment at Mombasa and possessed of a complete set of the weekly *Everyman*—so that is half the battle. I have thus far found no one on board very attractive. There are five members of the Commission, and I am glad to find that the two Civil Servants seem excellent fellows.

¹ Cmd. 8382.

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What they may be at Philippi (that is surely wrongly spelt) I cannot say yet. . . .

Bruce also wrote me before I went. That was cheering. The most satisfactory part of the going was the farewells. With them as stolen treasures in my heart, I wanted to sneak back when I got to Marseilles and the gangway to the boat was in front of me. I felt like a man who had cash and who could not spend it. It was burning holes in his pocket and he could only jingle it and say over and over again to himself, "I am rich," and then add dolefully, "but I cannot change a sixpence for a drink." Musing thus I felt a grip on the back of my neck, and fate shoved me up the boards. So I am here and am a matter of ten miles or so further off than when I began.

The voyage, with its enforced rest, and the heat of India improved his health, and in January he could write home from Madras "the ailments which troubled me for some time before I left England have gone and I am better than I have been for a long time."

* * * * *

As 1914 wore on, the International outlook darkened. There were those who began to remember the pessimistic aphorism that war is like death; you can postpone it, but you cannot prevent it. Nearer home, civil war was brewing in Ireland. The Government had erred when it drafted a Home Rule Bill for the whole country, despite the passionate resentment of Ulster; it erred when it shrank from repressing the open threat of violence which this policy had provoked. The result was Carson and the Ulster Volunteers, Redmond and the National Volunteers, a gun-running by the Ulstermen at Larne in April, a gun-running by the Nationalists at Howth in July, and in May the "mutiny" at the Curragh, when a number of officers were allowed to contract out of their prospective duty of serving against the Ulster insurgents. Mac-

Donald saw that the Conservatives who countenanced the armed and drilling Ulstermen were yielding to the very contagion of violence, which, in the guise of Syndicalism, Labour had struggled, long but successfully, to eject from its own system. He called them ironically revolutionaries and syndicalists. As early as March 8, he had warned them: "Let them start that sort of appeal to lawlessness and anarchy, to primitive brute force, when the minority was defeated by the majority in the ordinary constitutional way—let them start that and he would not like to prophesy as to who was going to write the last sentence." But civil war seemed to be drawing steadily nearer, until, as the vaster explosion shook Europe, the fires at home were hurriedly damped down.

A striking letter, in the spring of 1914, reveals much of MacDonald's mind on the eve of the first great crisis of his career. As to the Party, he strikes a new note of cautious optimism. On the Party indeed he was steadily establishing his hold, and in Parliament his team was both more disciplined and more effective.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

Linfield,

Chesham Bois.

14th March, 1914.

I am having a week-end off down here reading *Nether Lochaber*, Lauder's *Highland Legends*, Wilson's *Tales of the Borders* and similar books good for the soul. But I have had to turn for an hour to an article for the *Daily Citizen*, and as I put in the last full-stop your letter came and I answer it at once. . . .

Taking a general survey of the situation I am inclined to conclude that smoothing attempts will not succeed. The W.L.L.¹ must just go on gaining in importance and then difficulties will settle themselves. In the localities the three

¹ The Women's Labour League.

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wings will act together—will insist upon acting together, and the three personalities will be compelled to recognise that. Each will be afraid to make trouble. Private talk will be the only source of mischief. That is now being weakened as a factor for evil. It is concerned just a little with myself, but I have had a run of luck recently. Whole sections are now coming round. I know a lot of you disagreed with my line at Glasgow¹—especially the steam-roller incident. I did that quite deliberately and for a general purpose. It was successful for that purpose. If you would look at the reports published in T. U. circulars you would see what I mean. In any event that is done. . . .

But as to his own prospects he was not so optimistic. More than ever, he was realising what the loss of his wife must mean to him. He was a man partially disarmed. Never perhaps would he now be all that he might have been, had she lived. Not only had she soothed him in irritation, encouraged him in despondency, shielded him from nervous tension; in a sense she had been a window for him on the world itself. Through her he had seen other and serener vistas, made and shared friendships. He was a lonely man now.

I really honestly and truly wanted to remove myself from the centre of the Party this time (this remarkable letter proceeds) so that the possibilities I have made might eventuate under a guidance not so mud-stained and bloody with the fight as I am now, but the Party would have split into sections. So I had to go on and shall have to go on unless I retire altogether. If I could only give some promise of permanence to the combination which recent occurrences have brought about and to the present steady and imperturbable policy of the Parliamentary Party, retirement would have many allurements to offer me. I feel the mind of the solitary stag growing upon me. My fireside is desolate. I have no close friend in the world to share either the satisfac-

¹ At the Labour Conference.



MACDONALD WITH HIS CHILDREN JUST BEFORE
THE WAR

Back row (left to right): Alister, Malcolm, Ishbel. In front: Joan and Sheila.

tion of success or the disturbance of defeat. So I get driven in upon myself more and more, and I certainly do not improve. I am sure that the difficulties about which you write are partly due to the general position of affairs and I feel myself growing less and less able to improve them on the personal side. . . .

I am hoping to get to Bradford¹ but the worry of these last two or three years has given me a little disease and the doctors may want me at Easter. Except for that, nothing will keep me from the Conference, not even should the clouds rain rebels and malcontents, and though I am very tired of the sort of debates which I suppose we shall have there. I am not a delegate, however, as yet and may not be so I shall sit in the gallery and listen to you all. . . .

Now I return to the Highland folk-lore and general chat of *Nether Lochaber*. Every good wish to you all.

"I have no close friend in the world." In later years MacDonald did not speak of his loneliness. And it may be that, if he had, he would not always have had to make quite that sweeping and tragic admission. But an essentially lonely man he would remain, to the end. He was undoubtedly what is called clubbable, he could mix genially with all classes, he was liked in Parliament by members of all Parties. Lord Mottistone (then Colonel Seeley) relates² how one of his relaxations, when Secretary of State for War, was a recurrent symposium, in his room in the House, with George Wyndham and MacDonald, and how MacDonald would give them his books on Socialism, and they would have friendly wrangles over them. ("If Ramsay MacDonald had his way," said Wyndham, "everything would be socialised, or municipalised, except the clothes we stand up in." "No," replied MacDonald, "I know several men of your build; I shall want the clothes, but I will leave you your toothbrush.") He had acquaintances, fervent admirers

¹ For the L.L.P. Conference.

² *Adventure*, p. 148.

and well-wishers, and indeed friends in every walk of life, from fishermen at Lossiemouth to old Lord Morley, whom he would regularly visit at Wimbeldon. There were political friends, and friends of leisure hours and a number who were both. A story is told of a game of golf, which MacDonald played at Lossiemouth against Dr. Collis, an old friend and rival, who was then Medical Inspector of Factories in the Home Office. By chance, Sir Edward Troup, at that time Permanent Under Secretary of State for Home Affairs, was staying with Dr. Collis's father-in-law at Lossiemouth, and followed the game, to cheer on his subordinate in the Civil Service. It was agreed that if MacDonald—known to some of these Lossiemouth friends as “the anarchist”, because of the red tie he often wore then—should lose the game, he was to forfeit his right to deliver his usual onslaught, when the Home Office vote came up in the House. After a grim struggle, the match ended all square. Clearly MacDonald had not lost his right to assume the offensive in the Home Office debate. But had he won it? The point was too subtle even to discuss, and was left undetermined. In due course the debate came on. MacDonald attacked, as usual; but, what was not usual, he left the Factory Department immune—an interpretation of the result of the match which the Civil Servants observed with appreciation.

Nevertheless, when his wife died, a veil was drawn over his innermost self, which would seldom, if ever, be raised again. Perhaps it was nature's instinctive substitute for the protective companion whom he had lost, a profoundly sensitive man's last screen against the world. It was that final veil, perhaps, which enabled him to survive the prolonged and searching spiritual strain which he was now about to encounter. Never-

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theless, as long as that veil was drawn, complete intimacy was inevitably denied him. It is well to remember that it was without "a close friend in the world" that he was now to face the years of war.

IX

W A R

AUGUST, 1914—NOVEMBER, 1918

IN the afternoon of August 2, 1914, a huge crowd was wedged in Trafalgar Square. From the plinth, Keir Hardie, Arthur Henderson, George Lansbury, Cunningham-Graham and other speakers were denouncing war. It was the day after Germany had declared war on Russia. The sky over the square was dark and lowering, and at half-past four, while Hardie was still speaking, the clouds broke suddenly in a deluge of rain. At intervals a section of the onlookers sang the "Red Flag" or the "International," but in general the mood of the great audience was anxiety, not excitement. A resolution was passed, protesting against the imminent threat of war, and the secret diplomacy responsible for it, against any support for Russia and in favour of neutrality and the international solidarity of the working classes. The meeting ended, and the crowd dispersed through the rainy streets. Most of the speakers made their way sombrely to Lincoln's Inn Fields, to MacDonald's flat. MacDonald was not there, nor had he been present at the demonstration in Trafalgar Square. He had been summoned to consultation in Downing Street. In growing anxiety, the little group in the flat at Lincoln's Inn Fields awaited his return. MacDonald meanwhile

had made his way on foot towards Westminster. Shouldering his way, unnoticed, through the crowds which hung thick about Whitehall and Downing Street, he encountered Lord Morley. The old Radical stopped, and asked him what his line was going to be. MacDonald replied that he would have nothing to do with war. "Neither shall I," said Morley. But he added gloomily that the prospects were very dark. For these spokesmen of two epochs had encountered almost at the very moment when the tides of crisis turned. That morning, to Winston Churchill, it had "looked as if the majority would resign." Lloyd George himself had already taken counsel with MacDonald, and they had agreed that, if Britain went to war and Belgium had not been invaded, his only course would be to leave the Cabinet. But in the course of the day the Cabinet had decided (at the cost of John Burns's withdrawal) to promise to protect the French coasts against the German fleet; that day, too, the Conservative leaders had urged on the Prime Minister their view that any hesitation in supporting France and Russia would be fatal. That evening the German ultimatum reached Brussels. On the morrow Morley's view would be ancient history, unsupported in the Cabinet.

Meanwhile MacDonald made his way to Downing Street. It is said that he found Ministers still doubtful as to whether there would be popular support for war, and that he grimly reassured them. This, he said, would be the most popular war the country had ever fought. But there still seemed a possibility that it could be avoided. It was, however, no cheerful news that he brought back at last to the little gathering at Lincoln's Inn Fields.

That Sunday evening MacDonald was one of a party

which dined at Lord Riddell's house. Three members of the Liberal Cabinet were there—Mr. Lloyd George, Sir John Simon and C. F. G. Masterman. All were oppressed by varying degrees of doubt and perplexity. Mr. Lloyd George was for neutrality, provided that Germany would give an undertaking to respect the Belgian frontier, and not to enter the Channel to attack the French coast or French shipping. Those who had already made up their minds for intervention he called Jingoes. Lord Riddell thought that MacDonald seemed to agree that peace could not be preserved if Belgium were invaded, although the Labour Party would resist war on any other grounds. After dinner, MacDonald wished to make a telephone call, and as Lord Riddell was about to get him his number, the bell of the instrument rang. It was Sir John French, then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wanting to know whether we were going to war and, if so, whether we should send an army to the Continent, and who would command it. Riddell put his hand over the transmitter and repeated these inquiries to MacDonald, who smiled and suggested that he had better return to the dining-room and ask what to reply. Riddell did so, and came back to tell French that the odds were that we should go to war, that we should send an army, and that he would be in command. Upon which MacDonald observed, "They are all wrong. In three months there will be bread riots, and we shall come in."

Next day was August 3rd, Bank Holiday. The tempo of the tragedy quickened. The British Cabinet authorised mobilisation, Belgium rejected the German ultimatum, Britain replied with her own ultimatum to Germany, warning her to keep out of Belgium, or be at war with us; and in the afternoon Sir Edward Grey went down,

through the straining crowds, to Parliament, to make his historic speech. He told the packed, intent, and at first uncertain House that, technically, we were not committed to France, but that, morally, "let every man look into his own heart." And then he turned to Belgium. Here law, sentiment and interest all pointed unequivocally in the same direction. We had guaranteed Belgian integrity in 1839 and in 1870; for more than three hundred years the foundation of all our foreign policy had been to protect the independence of the Low Countries. And if we let France be crushed now, could we save ourselves, alone, disgraced and friendless, later on? By now there could be no doubt. Virtually the whole House was with the speaker. The news "they have cheered him" flew to the anxious diplomats in the Foreign Office. It had been a triumphant speech—"I think in the circumstances . . . the greatest speech delivered in our time," wrote Lord Hugh Cecil. When MacDonald rose—after Bonar Law had briefly pledged the Conservatives, and Redmond, amidst much enthusiasm, the Irish, to the war—it was with a profound sense of isolation. The House, of course, would be overwhelmingly and resentfully against him—there was a murmur of hostility when he rose, and some Members ostentatiously left the Chamber as he began to speak. And though he was speaking with full authority for his Party—twice within the last five days the Labour Members had met and condemned Sir Edward Grey and war—he can have had little hope, as he sensed the mounting passions inside and outside the House, that even his Party would be with him for long. It was with an inner foreknowledge of all that he would soon have to face, that he rose to make his protest. The brief speech contained in miniature almost all the arguments—

in parts apparently so hard to reconcile, and in their totality so little understood by the mass of his fellow-countrymen—which he was to employ throughout the war.

I should, had circumstances permitted, have preferred to remain silent this afternoon. But circumstances do not permit of that. I shall model what I have to say on the two speeches we have listened to, and I shall be brief. The right hon. Gentleman, to a House, which in a great majority is with him, has delivered a speech the echoes of which will go down in history. The speech has been impressive, but however much we may resist the conclusion to which he has come, we have not been able to resist the moving character of his appeal. I think he is wrong. I think the Government which he represents and for which he speaks is wrong. I think the verdict of history will be that they are wrong. We shall see. The effect of the right hon. Gentleman's speech in this House is not to be its final effect. There may be opportunities, or there may not be opportunities for us to go into details, but I want to say to this House, and to say it without equivocation, if the right hon. Gentleman had come here to-day and told us that our country is in danger, I do not care what party he appealed to, or to what class he appealed, we would be with him and behind him. If this is so, we will vote him what money he wants. Yes, and we will go further. We will offer him ourselves if the country is in danger. But he has not persuaded me that it is. He has not persuaded my hon. Friends who co-operate with me that it is, and I am perfectly certain, when his speech gets into cold print to-morrow, he will not persuade a large section of the country. If the nation's honour were in danger we would be with him. There has been no crime committed by statesmen of this character without those statesmen appealing to the nation's honour. We fought the Crimean War because of our honour. We rushed to South Africa because of our honour. The right hon. Gentleman is appealing to us to-day because of our honour.

There is a third point. If the right hon. Gentleman

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could come to us and tell us that a small European nationality like Belgium is in danger, and could assure us he is going to confine the conflict to that question, then we would support him. What is the use of talking about coming to the aid of Belgium, when, as a matter of fact, you are engaging in a whole European War which is not going to leave the map of Europe in the position it is in now. The right hon. Gentleman said nothing about Russia. We want to know about that. We want to try to find out what is going to happen, when it is all over, to the power of Russia in Europe, and we are not going to go blindly into this conflict without having some sort of a rough idea as to what is going to happen. Finally, so far as France is concerned, we say solemnly and definitely that no such friendship as the right hon. Gentleman describes between one nation and another could ever justify one of those nations entering into war on behalf of the other. If France is really in danger, if, as the result of this, we are going to have the power, civilisation and genius of France removed from European history, then let him say so. But it is an absolutely impossible conception which we are talking about to endeavour to justify that which the right hon. Gentleman has foreshadowed.

I not only know, but I feel that the feeling of the House is against us. I have been through this before, and 1906 came as part recompense. It will come again. We are going to go through it all. We will go through it all. So far as we are concerned whatever may happen, whatever may be said about us, whatever attacks may be made upon us, we will take the action that we will take, of saying that this country ought to have remained neutral, because in the deepest parts of our hearts, we believe that that was right and that that alone was consistent with the honour of the country and the traditions of the party that are now in office.

“We will go through it all.” MacDonald had no illusions either, as to how much “it all” would mean, or how soon it would commence.

By eleven o’clock next night we were at war. The

speed of the unfolding tragedy, and in particular the invasion of Belgium, was transforming opinion hourly. The Radical journalist, Massingham, hastened to recant, in the mid-week *Daily News*, the opposition to war he had expressed in the *Nation* at the previous week-end; H. G. Wells proclaimed that the sword had been drawn for peace (and was soon engaged in a vituperative controversy with Hardie and MacDonald in the columns of the *Labour Leader*, in the course of which he referred to "the spiteful, lying chatter of the shabbiest scum of Socialism"). The Labour Party itself wavered, and then bent, before the blast. On August 5th, the Executive and the Parliamentary Party, it is true, repeated its condemnation of Sir Edward Grey; "the Labour movement reiterates the fact that it has opposed the policy which has produced the war, and that its duty now is to secure peace at the earliest possible moment on such conditions as will provide the best opportunities for the re-establishment of amicable feelings between the workers of Europe." Nothing perhaps more clearly illustrates how narrow, though sundering, was the intellectual division which separated MacDonald from the majority of his colleagues than the fact that this resolution remained, unrescinded, theoretically, at least, the official policy of Labour, throughout the war. "We condemn the policy which has produced the war, we do not obstruct the war effort, but our duty is to secure peace at the earliest possible moment"—from first to last both he and they would have claimed that they were faithfully fulfilling that declaration. Both they and he were for winning the war, now that it had begun. Yet from that identical point of departure, they were in due course to become loyal members of the war coalition, Cabinet Ministers or orators on recruiting platforms, he the best-hated

man in Britain, decried and derided by the man in the street as a pacifist, a pro-German, and even as a traitor. The Labour declaration of August 5th was not a refusal to participate in the war. But it was essentially a *moderate* pronouncement. And the clue to MacDonald's attitude during the next four years, as during the previous eight, is that, even in war-time, he was to remain a moderate. And in a war there is no room for moderates—on either side of the controversy.

The parting of the ways came at once, on the very day of the resolution. As the Parliamentary Party itself reported, eighteen months later, "the opinion of the majority of the Party . . . crystallised into a conviction that under the circumstances it was impossible for this country to have remained neutral." And on that same evening, August 5th, a majority of Labour Members declined to accept MacDonald's proposal that, as Chairman, he should speak, in the sense of the resolution they had just passed, against the Prime Minister's demand for a war credit of one hundred millions. The resolution had in fact been a compromise, passed in a vain attempt to maintain the unity of the Party. MacDonald at once resigned his Chairmanship. A few minutes later he walked down the corridor of the House to a board meeting of the Labour newspaper, the *Daily Citizen*, of which he was also Chairman, and very calmly went through the same discussion again. Here, too, as had become inevitable, he was outvoted; but of this Board he remained Chairman until the demise of the paper, in June of the following year. The work of Chairman of the Parliamentary Party was handed over to Henderson, who at first remained Chief Whip, but was subsequently elected to the Chairmanship proper. MacDonald now found himself one of a small minority in his own Party.

The I.L.P. Members, Hardie (who died in August, 1915), Richardson, Jowett, Anderson, when he was elected towards the end of 1914, and, when he returned from Australia, Snowden were also, though not for precisely the same reasons or in precisely the same sense, critics of the war. But all the other Labour Members were, first and foremost, for winning the war, and therefore for thorough co-operation with the Government. On August 29th the Labour Party agreed to a political truce in the constituencies and to co-operation in the recruiting campaign; on May 19th, 1915, it entered the Coalition Government. From both decisions, needless to say, MacDonald dissented. Almost miraculously, as we shall see, the Party did not split. MacDonald remained Treasurer, and a member therefore of its executive. On committees of various kinds majority and dissentients worked amicably together. But henceforth till the end of the war, if he was to continue, as he was determined, to put his views before the country, it could not be from the official Labour platforms. And so he found himself at once in renewed intimacy with the I.L.P., chief spokesman of the very body which had chiefly housed those "phraseologists," whose enthusiasm had sometimes in recent years so embarrassed his leadership. From being so constantly suspect, he became suddenly once again the idol of the Left wing. The association was not entirely easy for MacDonald. The realistic and rational Lowlander in him remained fundamentally a moderate all through the war, almost the last moderate left in the British Isles. Intellectually therefore he would never be altogether comfortable in the I.L.P., which was always essentially an organisation of extremists, in which passions ran as high, and thinking was as confused, as on the other side of the controversy. But the strong

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emotional vein in him enabled him to sympathise with his colleagues' fervour, and in a sense to share it, even while he consciously stood aloof from the mental confusions which it often bred. With all its difficulties, the association was to have the most far-reaching effects upon MacDonald, upon his later fortunes and upon the political history of his country.

The I.L.P. had no hesitations as to its attitude to war. Within a week of the outbreak, its Administrative Council was drafting a manifesto in a small hotel in Manchester. MacDonald, who was not a Member of the Council, was not present, and Hardie, as I have been told by one who was there, made a generous and foresighted plea for loyalty to him. "We must forget," he said, "the little differences we have had with MacDonald. I have had some rather serious differences with him myself, but now we must rally round him. He will need all the help and support we can give him. He it is who will have to bear most of the abuse; the Press attack has commenced, and most of it will be centred round him."

* * * * *

MacDonald's first formal, personal pronouncement on the war, which was also his first violent breach with the majority of his fellow-countrymen, appeared in the *Labour Leader* of August 13th. Up to this moment, as far as the public was concerned, he had perhaps not yet burnt his boats—after all, in the momentous debate of August 3rd he had been the spokesman of his Party, a Party which had now veered towards the orthodox view. In the interval between speech and article, it is true, he had visited Leicester (on August 7th), explained his views to a joint meeting of all the Labour organisations in his constituency, and received a unanimous and

enthusiastic vote of confidence. But at Leicester, though he had said hard words of Grey and scouted the suggestion that we were fighting for Belgian independence, he had made it plain that, now we were in the war, we must win it—"whatever our views may be of the origins of the war, we must go through with it." Moreover, the general public knew nothing of the Leicester meeting. The article of August 13th, however, was widely quoted. It roused an instant storm, a storm which would howl round his ears, unabated, for four years and longer. Perhaps, if he had said and written nothing else about the war, this one article would have been sufficient of itself to ensure him the suspicion or hatred of vast numbers of his fellow-countrymen. And yet the general purport of the thing is not provocative. It reviews a strictly limited field, the responsibility for the outbreak of war. It is not concerned with his attitude to the war, now that it is begun. The *entente*, he says in effect, the most dangerous possible form of the dangerous pursuit of a European balance of power, made war certain. When the crisis came, Grey did his best "to undo the result of his own policy," and keep the peace between Germany and Russia. Failing, he strove to make certain that we should go to war, as France's ally. Here the German invasion of Belgium, providing the British people with their indispensable idealistic motive, came opportunely to hand. But we were in fact at war because a fortnight of Grey's negotiations had failed to avert the inevitable result of eight years of Grey's long-term diplomacy—which had handed us over, morally bound hand and foot, to an Entente with France, and, through France, with Russia. The British people had had neither knowledge of, nor control over, the immense obligations to which they were being committed, and of which they learned first

on the day before war was declared. On a short view, in fact, Germany and Russia were mainly responsible for the war; "taking a longer view, we are equally responsible." There is little in these strictures on the dangers of the balance of power, of an undefined *entente* and of secret diplomacy, from which a historian to-day need dissent, though, in view of all the circumstances, he would be unlikely to accept the conclusion that "we are equally responsible." And whatever experts might have to say of the obscurities and perils involved in Grey's use of the diplomatic technique of his day, the palpable fact remained that, during the last two decades, a militarist oligarchy in Prussia had been perfecting a war machine, more formidable than the world had ever yet seen, to the accompaniment of a constant succession of boasts and threats. On selfish grounds alone, Britain, a satisfied, if not a satiated, power, was deeply concerned to preserve the peace; Germany could only achieve her constantly proclaimed ambitions by war. For years past, the British public had heard of the Kaiser's bellicose posturings; it was aware that "The Day" was toasted in the German, but not in the British, army. It was not prepared to believe that this war had been made in Britain. It could not be expected, now that war had come, to recognise the truth underlying MacDonald's criticisms, a truth which is perhaps more conspicuous to-day—that a possessing Power, which vaguely half-commits itself to a system of defensive pacts, cannot plead complete innocence when a challenge to its partners involves it in war. But it was not the general purport of his article which earned MacDonald so rapidly such widespread and bitter hostility in his own country, so much as isolated sentences from it. Quoted without their settings, these read like virulent anti-British

propaganda, and, what was more unfortunate, were used as such in Germany.

Finally, so anxious was Germany to confine the limits of the war, the German Ambassador asked Sir Edward Grey to propose his own conditions of neutrality, and Sir Edward Grey declined to discuss the matter. *This fact was suppressed by Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Asquith in their speeches in Parliament.*

Sir Edward Grey . . . worked deliberately to involve us in the war, using Belgium as his chief excuse.

. . . those of us who for the last eight years have regarded Sir Edward Grey as a menace to the peace of Europe . . .

. . . the European war is the result of the existence of the *entente* and the alliance . . .

If France had decided to attack Germany through Belgium, Sir Edward Grey would not have objected . . .

It was a pretty little game in hypocrisy, which the magnificent valour of the Belgians will enable the Government to hide up for the time being.

It is not difficult to see what damaging use could be made of isolated quotations such as these, both by the enemies of MacDonald and by the enemies of Britain. Both were quick to seize their opportunity. MacDonald's words were circulated by the German Government, both in Germany and in the neutral countries, which were now sitting in judgment upon the rival causes. In Britain they were quoted, with savage comments, throughout the Press. As long as the war lasted, it would have been difficult for MacDonald to live down the effect produced by extracts such as these, even if this had been his one and only utterance. A nation fighting for its life is in no judicial temper, nor is it disposed to make allowances for citizens who, it is told, are aiding and abetting the common foe. It has neither the opportunity

nor the patience to hunt up contexts. It does not reflect that the object of the dissentient critic was not so much to pronounce a comprehensive judgment, as to restore a balance passionately tilted towards national self-justification. Absorbed in its own mental agony, it is content to believe him an enemy of his country. There was a tragic injudiciousness about that article—in all probability MacDonald had no idea how widely the obscure *Labour Leader* would be quoted. But war had broken out; he could not alter that. And these animadversions on its causes raised clouds of hostility and suspicion, which effectually cut him off from any wider national audience for what he would have to say upon the conduct of the war, now that it had come. That the fundamental wisdom of what he said about the war, once it had begun, was so completely misrepresented, misunderstood and ignored by his fellow-countrymen, largely because of the prejudices stirred by this first attack on the diplomacy which caused it—this was MacDonald's tragedy, and, as now begins to appear, the tragedy of his country and of the world. For, if those who had power had heeded what he had to say, the war of 1914 to 1918 might have been certainly the last great war in Europe.

* * * * *

The early article from which these contexts were torn was itself, as we have seen, of a far from comprehensive character. It was concerned only with the origins of the war. What was MacDonald's considered attitude to the war, as it dragged its slow agonies from month to month? Was he, as is probably still supposed by a vast majority of British citizens, a pacifist? Or a mere obstructionist? Or were H. G. Wells's bitter words justified?

They cry "Peace" just out of contrariness; it is a way of annoying old friends in office; it is an excuse for shirking, for unhelpfulness; it is an appeal for the vote of the shirker; it is a sort of political lock-up investment against possible discontents after the war; it is a cry of distress; at any rate, except for Mr. Bertrand Russell, none of these people are prepared with any definition of peace at all.¹

It can be said at once that, on MacDonald at least, this judgment was grotesquely unfair. Yet, at the time when it was made, nine-tenths of his fellow-countrymen, if they had dissented from it at all, would have dissented only to ask that it should be more severe. Something, it may be, he contributed himself to the completeness with which he was misunderstood in war-time. Much more was due to his opponents, by whom, inevitably, he was partially quoted, misquoted, and, above all, left unquoted, as suited them best. And then, when, after the war, to the whole world's astonishment, he rose suddenly to influence and power once more, the past, as if by common consent, was left in its grave, undisturbed. Every one knew that he had been somehow "against the war." Not one in a thousand knew what in fact he said or thought.

We have, to begin with, to picture a man of exceptional courage, a man who *enjoyed* physical danger, who went out of his way to be driven at high speeds or to fly in bad weather, a man who faced hostile crowds with a kind of tense exhilaration, a man whom the best of judges found noticeably cool under fire. Nevertheless—it was a corollary of his scientific bent—he was essentially a moderate. He was determined not to let passion colour and distort his judgment. In his complex character there was a powerful emotional strain, and there is

¹ Letter to *Labour Leader*, May 25th, 1916.

no doubt that he had an intense emotional, as well as an intense rational, hatred of war. But he was always on his guard against the effects of his emotions upon his reason; and it was a source of genuine discomfort to him in war-time that so many of his supporters, like his opponents, had in fact become extremists "for the duration." Intellectually he was a moderate, but a moderate with all the emotional equipment of a fanatic—and this was one of the periods when that essential paradox of MacDonald goes far to explain him.

Then again, this was a man with a profound mistrust of violence. Violence, even in peace-time, was a negation of his entire political faith—a moderate's faith in reason, a scientist's faith in orderly and inevitable evolution. He hated the idea of war for the same reasons, and with the same passion, as he hated the idea of revolution. Ever since he had become influential in his Party, he had been waging a truceless combat within it against the doctrines whose ultimate sanction was violence. And war was violence on the grand scale. Not only was it unscientific, not only was it death to the internationalism for, and with, which he had worked ever since he first interested himself in politics; not only did it hand the nation over to the control of the type of mind he most distrusted; worse than all this, it bred the countless personal tragedies of which he had seen so many with his own eyes in South Africa. And he had seen them in the company of his wife. With her at his side, he had borne his testimony against the South African war. Not to bear his testimony, now that he was alone, against this vastly greater and more intimidating tragedy, would this not have been to betray, and dishonour, her memory? That perhaps, in the last

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analysis, was the rock on which he stood. To her, to the end of his life, he was always loyal.

His considered judgment of the war, like all rational opinion, was rooted thus in instinct and emotion. He was not, on intellectual grounds, opposed to all war as such, but it is not easy to imagine the particular war of which he would have approved. Instinctively, before the logical *pros* and *cons* were argued, he was an anti-war man. For all that, perhaps indeed because of that, his judgment remained, throughout, extraordinarily cool and clear-sighted. Whatever may be thought of his personal attitude to the vast tragedy which now unrolled itself, it is impossible to overlook the prophetic streak in it. Some of what was to come he did not foresee—he thought, for example, that the war would strengthen the military despotism in Russia, and, though in the long run it certainly did establish military despotism in Russia, it was not the military despotism of which MacDonald was thinking. But in general he saw only too clearly the shape of things to come. It was in August of 1914 that he wrote:

I read and listen to the moral flamboyancies of those who tell us that this is the last war, that from it is to date the overthrow of the military castes of Europe, that from the destruction of the Berlin War Office the Peace Temple at the Hague is to come into real being. It is all moonshine. Far more likely is it that this war is the beginning of a new military despotism in Europe, of new alarms, new hatreds and oppositions, new menaces and alliances; the beginning of a dark epoch dangerous, not merely to democracy, but to civilisation itself.¹

"I have been reminded," he had written on August 13th,

¹ *Labour Leader*, August 27th, 1914.

of one of those sombre judgments which the prophet who lived in evil times uttered against Israel. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" Aye, what will ye do in the end thereof?

Although what MacDonald thought, said and wrote about the war was sometimes subtle and occasionally obscure, although it involved him, as we shall see, in some queer political alliances and estrangements, which themselves sometimes coloured his views or, more often, distorted them for the public, the fact remains that it can all be summarised in three quite simple assertions. *Firstly*, we were wrong to enter the war. *Secondly*, now that we were in it, the war must be won. *Thirdly*, even in war-time, the normal, unimpassioned, rational mind of peace, the temper of the moderate, must somehow be kept alive, so that no reasonable opportunity of ending the war should be let slip, so that, while conquering militarism in Berlin, we should not establish militarism in London, and, above all, so that the peace, when it came, should not be the vindictive, military, peace which must infallibly breed more wars. Whatever caused MacDonald to become for the man in the street the arch-pacifist and traitor, it was not his own doctrines.

Firstly—the reasons for which MacDonald held that Britain should have kept out of the war have already been suggested. What ensured our entering it, he maintained, was Grey's secret commitment to France. Belgian independence may have been the people's motive, but it had no more to do with the real decision "than a shower of rain"; to an invasion of Belgium by France Grey would have had no objections. As he wrote to the *Morning Post*, "the invasion of Belgium, a criminal

result of the war, was made to appear to the generously-minded and pacific sections of the British public as the only cause why we were at war." Moreover the war for liberty and democracy was a war with Russia as ally, Russia the most brutal despotism in Europe, which victory could only inflame and strengthen. We claimed that we were fighting against Prussian militarism, but militarism can never be destroyed from without, or by war; it can be cracked, like a shell, from within, by the political and spiritual growth of a nation; and that process, thanks to the German Social Democrats, was, he believed, already at work, and, but for the war, might soon have succeeded. "If I had to choose between German militarism for yet a little while and the battles already fought," he wrote on August 27th, 1914, "the outrages already committed, the women and children already made desolate, with their loved ones and protectors nothing but shadows seen through tears, I would unhesitatingly choose the former." And if it were said that, if we did not fight now, we should inevitably have to fight, alone, discredited and at an incalculable disadvantage, later on, MacDonald (though this was an argument which he less frequently countered) would reply that, even if Germany won, she could not subject France, and the Channel ports, to permanent military occupation, and that to assume that, sooner or later, war between Britain and Germany was inevitable was precisely the illusion against which he had always protested. To the plain man, who saw the war, simply but vividly, as a desperate struggle for existence against a long-premeditated bid for world-domination by a barbarous military oligarchy in Berlin, all this, if he had heard or read MacDonald's utterances, would have appeared to be mere disingenuous special pleading. And

when, from one pen or another, it was repeated, long after the death-grapple had been joined, in issue after issue of *Forward* or the *Labour Leader*, it seemed an inexcusable attempt to demoralise the nation-at-war. But MacDonald was quite clear that, during the early months of the war at any rate, it was impossible for him to keep silent as to its origins. As he explained in October, 1914:

We might prefer to say nothing about causes when hostilities have begun in earnest and after we had made our position quite clear. But the other side, knowing that its popularity is ephemeral and that the highest tides ebb, must justify itself. Recruiting meetings are turned into political gatherings to inculcate jingoism and hatred. It is assumed that men will not defend their country unless they are convinced that the two or three gentlemen responsible for its foreign policy have been right, and so every criticism of them is treason and every doubt thrown upon their omniscience is a depletion of the army. As some Labour members who have joined the recruiting campaign of public meetings have found, they have been compelled, not only to appeal for the defence of their country, but to confess that they have been giving wrong votes in the House of Commons for years. We cannot allow this propaganda and browbeating to go altogether unchallenged. We have to protect the opinion to which the country will have to trust later on from being misled and stampeded; we must put the true side, the facts, to our own people at any rate.¹

MacDonald's case against the decision of August the fourth, 1914, was perhaps, as an uncompromising pacifist who saw much of MacDonald during the war has told me that it struck him at the time, the plea of a man whose emotional abhorrence of war, whose instinct for moderation in all things, led him sometimes to stretch a political argument to the neighbourhood of breaking

¹ *Socialist Review*, October, 1914.

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point; but it cannot be denied that formidable political arguments are there.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

3 Lincoln's Inn Fields,

London, W.C.

February 8, 1915.

. . . I think as time goes on people will ask, "Why did Belgium resist?" and their answer will be given in accordance with the further knowledge we acquire of whether Germany really meant to use it simply as a right of way or intended to annex it. If the former is true the Belgian sacrifice, heroic as the world will always regard it, has been useless from the point of view of Belgium itself. If the latter was Germany's intention and it can be *proved* to be such, the Belgian sacrifice will be accepted as having been not merely heroic in itself but necessary in the circumstances, just like the Scots' in the days of Edward, or the Italians' under the inspiration of Mazzini. At the moment Vandervelde's responsibility is tremendous, but the time is not come for trying him. The witnesses are not available.

We have to admit, looking round the whole question, now, that amongst the Socialists of France and Belgium there has been a very deep-seated distrust of the Germans, and, on the other hand that amongst the German Socialists there has been an equally deep-seated weakness in their relations to the governing authorities of the Empire. It is interesting to try and explain the one and the other, but I think these are the facts we must accept. How do you find opinion in the country going? My meetings are tremendously successful.

Secondly, though this aspect of his views scarcely filtered through to the man in the street, MacDonald repeatedly made it clear that he fully recognised that, since war had come, it must be won. He had no wish to weaken or obstruct the national effort. He intended to stand now in fact where he had stood during the



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April 15th, 1914.

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Moroccan crisis of 1911, when, it will be remembered, he had warned the German Government that no one should "assume for a single moment that party divisions in this country will weaken the national spirit or national unity."¹ And he remained convinced, now that war had come, that Party divisions were not weakening the national spirit. "The fearless statement of our position now is not keeping a single recruit from the colours, but will make it easy for our Continental neighbours to settle down in amity after the war is over."² To the end of his life, he would speak with irritation of the charge that he was, or ever had been, a pacifist. Surrounded and applauded by Tolstoyans who condemned all violence, he was never a Tolstoyan himself, as he had repeatedly to explain to his colleagues.

Suffice it for me to say at the moment that for myself I cannot accept that doctrine. It is emerging from the moral evolution of the world. I wait for it like Simeon on the temple steps. But it has not yet come. Doctrines like that must be embodied before they can be followed. I give it the homage of one who is working for its embodiment. Beyond that I cannot go now.³

Indeed he would actually urge his audiences to play their full part in the national effort. "Those who can enlist, ought to enlist, those who are working in munition factories should do so whole-heartedly"—this was in his own *Leicester Pioneer*, on July 16th, 1915. Mr. Lees-Smith tells me that in 1917, when the military outlook was particularly black, MacDonald said to him, "If this goes on, we shall have to rally to the Government." "Neither defeat nor surrender is in my vocabulary,"

¹ See above, p. 230. ² *Labour Leader*, October 8th, 1914.

³ *Socialist Review*, October, 1914.

he said in the House, in June, 1918—the real defeatists were those who were bidding fair to perpetuate a heritage of war in Europe. And, defending the I.L.P., on his delicate mission as fraternal delegate to the Trades Union Congress of 1916, he claimed, “We have never said that you should shirk your duties. We have never said that you should forget at this moment that the nation demands the best that you can give it.”

There is nothing inconsistent in Socialists saying that their native land should be protected in its day of trial, or that when it finds itself in a war it should be helped to get out of it without disgrace and dishonour, if that be at all possible. . . . To reconstruct Europe and readjust the politics of the world with Great Britain beaten and on her knees is a military revolution which no one with any imagination would welcome or even think of complacently.

In fact “the Party as a Party has not been one of non-resistance. That does not mark the line of division between us and our opponents. . . . Hundreds of our members have enlisted without forfeiting their attachment to us.”¹ What then did “mark the line of division” between MacDonald and his opponents? Not the question, practically important though it might be, of what part to play in the national effort. The true line of division, as we shall see in a moment, lay elsewhere. And as to this immediate problem of whether or not to stand aloof from the war, for him the dividing line was evidently the recruiting platform. He could not appeal to young men to fight in a war which he had condemned, any more than he could agree to coalition with a Government which he was constantly criticising. If he had done either, it would have been the end of his real task, the keeping of the peace mind, of the spirit of

¹ *Labour Leader*, December 30th, 1915.

moderation, alive in war-time. But, as he pointed out to an I.L.P. meeting at Bristol, during the Trades Union Congress in September, 1915, the I.L.P. had always clearly laid it down that this recruiting business was a matter for the individual conscience. The majority of those who remained in the I.L.P. (many, if not most of them, after all, were thoroughgoing pacifists), and its official organ, the *Labour Leader*, stood unequivocally aloof from recruiting, and condemned the official Labour Party for taking part in it. But some members were actually in the trenches. And it was not impossible for a prominent member—such as Clynes—to stand on a recruiting platform without forfeiting his membership. “The question that is always facing us,” wrote MacDonald in the *Socialist Review*, in October, 1914, “is that of recruiting.”

As a matter of fact that is no Socialist test at all. Always assuming that we are not Tolstoyans or members of the Society of Friends, there is really nothing in this problem except individual judgment. Personally, I could not appear on a pro-war platform. I do not believe in recruiting meetings. I think them quite unnecessary if the State would do its duty to the families and dependents of the men who enlist; and the so-called political truce which they are supposed to mark is to me nothing but humbug. To get men to meetings and then work them up to a great pitch of excitement by the wildest and most ranting statements is wrong and, as some officers recently told me, has not produced very satisfactory results. It is not the way to enlist an army. I believe that the effect of the whole thing is antagonistic to Labour’s principles, self-respect, and political efficiency. Yet, I can see how Socialists may quite conscientiously disagree on this matter, and provided that their speeches retain some distinctive quality of the working-class mind, and put the Labour point of view, they must be allowed to use their own judgment.

A letter which MacDonald wrote to the Mayor of Leicester, in reply to an invitation to appear at a recruiting-meeting, earned some notoriety at the time, and was quoted, with derisive comment, by Lord Snowden in his recent *Autobiography*, as a specimen of his capacity for what Lord Snowden calls "dancing round the mulberry bush," which I take to mean, evading a simple issue in a cloud of words. One of MacDonald's critics even pointed to it as evidence that he was in a state of indecision for weeks after the outbreak of war.

To the Mayor of Leicester.

MY DEAR MR. MAYOR,

I am very sorry indeed that I cannot be with you on Friday. My opinions regarding the causes of war are pretty well known, except in so far as they have been misrepresented; but we are in it. It will work itself out now. Might and spirit will win, and incalculable political and social consequences will follow upon victory. Victory therefore must be ours. England is not played out. Her mission is not accomplished. . . . History will in due time apportion the praise and blame, but the young men of the country must, for the moment, settle the immediate issue of victory. . . . Should an opportunity arise to enable me to appeal to the pure love of country—which I know is the precious sentiment in all our hearts, keeping it clear of thoughts which I believe to be alien to real patriotism—I shall gladly take that opportunity. If need be, I shall make it myself. I want the serious men of the Trade Union, the Brotherhood, and similar movements to face their duty. To such men it is enough to say, "England has need of you," to say it in the right way. They will gather to her aid. They will protect her, and when the war is over they will see to it that the policies and conditions that make it will go like the mists of a plague and the shadows of a pestilence.

W A R

Lord Snowden's derision is as out of place as Mr. Lloyd George's assertion¹ that, with Snowden, MacDonald "throughout the war persistently opposed every effort to secure recruits." The letter is in fact a meticulous statement of an unusual, but a perfectly intelligible, standpoint. The writer could not appear upon a recruiting platform—and take his share in the "wild and ranting statements," which he believed to be "alien to real patriotism"—without destroying his true personal contribution to the national war effort, which was to preserve, within a nation at war, some remnant of that unimpassioned peace mind which was so indispensable, if the soldiers were not ultimately to be betrayed by a mere soldiers' peace. To "the serious men of the Trade Union, the Brotherhood and similar movements" he could talk his own language, he could "say it in the right way," and be understood. And that he did "make his own opportunity" to bid them "do their duty," we have seen. Bidding them do their duty, was not, of course, the principal theme of his speeches. A thousand voices were busy with that; his was the far more solitary and desperate task of urging them to think of the eventual peace. And those passages of speech or article in which he made it clear that he too was for winning the war (though not for winning it by a "knock-out blow") never reached the general public. For them he was, quite simply, the leader of the pacifists, and therefore himself the arch-pacifist. The fact remains that he did say these things, and said them often. They even disquieted his colleagues in the I.L.P., who were apt to feel that he was by no means altogether sound. They would no doubt have been even more disquieted, but for MacDonald's immense unpopularity with the general

¹ *War Memoirs*, ii, 894.

public. This in itself was, in a sense, a guarantee of his orthodoxy. He did not perhaps share all their views, but there could be no doubt about his being their scapegoat. And pacifist audiences soon cheered him with a new, fierce note of devotion, accorded to no other public figure of that time. But, strangely and significantly enough, perhaps the men who understood and shared his outlook most completely were a small minority of serving soldiers. Many of them were young men who had volunteered in the first idealism of 1914 and, as the war dragged on, began to find the spirit of its later months disquietingly alien to them. At the celebrated meeting on Plumstead Common, Woolwich, in the summer of 1918, where his enemies were determined that he should not be heard, and a reward is said to have been offered for any one who "brought in MacDonald dead or alive," a number of Scottish soldiers sacrificed some of their brief leave from the trenches to act as his bodyguard, and fought doughtily in that extraordinary *mélée*. And there were thoughtful young officers who took counsel with him all through the war. One was Maitland Hardyman, who in 1918, at twenty-three, was the youngest Colonel in the army, had already won the Military Cross, and was a member of both I.L.P. and U.D.C. On one occasion Hardyman and another officer, who also wore the Military Cross, were dining with MacDonald at the House. They talked of politics after the war, and of the knightly soldier "who fought with love in his heart, who cherished his men, whose sword was clean and whose heart was pure, who went into battle as though going to the Last Supper." A Labour Member, of the majority, strolled across to talk to them. "You are Unionists, of course?" he said to the soldiers. "No! Liberals? I suppose there are many officers who

are Liberals now." Hardyman replied, "We are dining with our Captain; we belong to the I.L.P." When another gallant officer, Siegfried Sassoon, made his celebrated gesture of protest, Hardyman was much disturbed. He too felt that the idealism had gone out of the war. He wrote to MacDonald for advice, and later, when on leave, came to his house to consult him, with a letter, resigning his commission, in his pocket. "I see the good young man now," wrote MacDonald, "with the calm but troubled mind, sitting on my chair, with the morning sun behind him." They talked long "of life and death, and hardships and duty." The result was that Hardyman decided to go back to France.

But there is even better evidence that neither obstructing the nation's effort, nor standing fastidiously aloof from it, was proper to MacDonald's philosophy. Somewhere about the beginning of December, 1914, he crossed to Belgium, as a volunteer member of an ambulance unit, organised by Dr. Hector Munro, which was then attached to the Belgian army at Furnes. He was met at Dunkirk, motored to the ambulance, and left in his quarters for the night. Next morning he had disappeared. Agitated inquiry at length revealed that he had been arrested, on instructions from the British authorities. The official explanation was that his passport was not in order. In fact, however, British Authority on the spot, not without promptings from MacDonald's enemies at home, considered him too dangerous a person to be allowed within reach of the Western front. The best that Dr. Munro could do, after a good deal of bargaining, was to get his distinguished visitor released, on condition that he personally drove him back to Dunkirk, accompanied by a Belgian military guard, and saw him on board the boat for England.

Thus grotesquely ended MacDonald's attempt to take an active part, as a non-combatant, in the war. Perhaps, if it had not been thwarted, he would have served some length of time overseas; (his elder son was three years with the Friends' Medical Corps). And that—for it would have been known at home, as this brief episode never was—would have very much mitigated, if not altogether ended, his extreme unpopularity. Certainly any form of service overseas would have been a soft, a very soft, option for MacDonald. His original protest against the war already delivered, he could honourably have kept silence henceforth—in Belgium. He could have spared himself the black years ahead. But he knew, as he returned from that ill-starred adventure, that so easy a way out was not for him. This was a warning. The hand of Providence had closed that tempting exit. He would not again attempt to escape. He would settle down to face the long, hopeless struggle, the misunderstandings, the lost friendships, the savage enmities, the ostracism. And since, but for that phase in his career, he might well not have been chosen as Leader of the Party in 1922, it may be that the private enemy who intrigued to arrange MacDonald's ignominious removal from Belgium in 1914, ensured his becoming Prime Minister ten years later.

But this was not the end of the Belgian episode. MacDonald accepted the rejection of his services as final—indeed as Providential, almost as if an angel with a flaming sword had barred the only outlet from the dark valley ahead of him. But he had no intention of submitting passively to the affront. He interviewed Lord Kitchener, and described his experiences. Kitchener was much annoyed at the incident, and at once gave instructions that he should be provided with an

"omnibus" pass to the whole of the Western front. A fortnight after his expulsion, MacDonald returned to the front, this time as an official visitor. Nor did he omit to travel by way of Dunkirk, where it fell to the lot of the officers, who had recently ordered his deportation, to receive him as the guest of the British Government. A letter written on the day before he sailed suggests his sombre mood.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

House of Commons.

December 20, 1914.

I meant to write to you before, but I have been terribly filled up with Commissions, Committees and an etc. of many pressing little things. I once had a kind of Calendar of well-printed sheets with five days on each sheet, the dates only without the days of the week so that it was not confined to any one year. I found it very helpful. It hung by my looking-glass and the daily extract always faced me first thing in the morning. I thought of something like that. Your birthday book is another possibility, however. You can think things out and I shall be glad to help in completing the proposal whatever it is. M. had no book of extracts so far as I know and the ones she liked best (they were few because she was steady and concentrated) are in the biography. But I might find others if desirable.

I can spare you another copy of the small book.¹ Let it be my Christmas gift to you. I am sending none this year. It is all too sad and heavy. The unveiling of the memorial² was the occasion of a sacramental gathering of friends—the last. The grass is growing now and the past seems to be so definitely and finally a past. Gomme, I am told, was very fine and every one is happy about the memorial. But what a difference this war is making in one's outlook

¹ His memoir of his wife.

² A memorial to Mrs. MacDonald was unveiled in Lincoln's Inn Fields on December 19th, 1914. It consists of a granite seat surmounted by a bronze group, of Mrs. MacDonald with hands stretched over the heads of a number of merry children, with the inscription "This seat is placed here in memory of Margaret MacDonald, who spent her life in helping others." Sir Lawrence Gomme, Clerk to the London County Council, spoke at the ceremony.

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and hopes. I am almost afraid to think of what the end is to be.

I am going down to Dover to-night and am crossing early to-morrow morning for more work in Belgium. I hope to be back on Christmas eve. I am glad that Anderson has got in at last.¹ The new conditions are trying. They, of course, must change men—some one way, some other ways. I hope he will remain faithful and work hard.

All good wishes to you and yours for the New Year,
Yours always,

J. R. M.

Lord Mottistone, then General Seeley, a personal friend of MacDonald's, met him by appointment, in the empty square at Poperinghe, and expressed on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief the general regrets and apologies for his treatment on his last visit. There is an interesting account in his *Adventure*² of what followed. MacDonald received the apologies very amiably, and laughed the incident off. They then drove off towards Ypres in the general's car, the ambulance, in which MacDonald had arrived, following a respectful half-mile behind them. They drove through Ypres, where an occasional shell was falling, and out by the Menin Gate. From the first ridge beyond, General Seeley pointed out the front line. MacDonald wished to go forward, but Seeley said that there was no time, and that in any case civilians visiting hospitals were not supposed to expose themselves to rifle fire. They then took the road along the west bank of the Yser canal, a short-cut, most of which, though within range of the enemy, was out of view. For two miles only it would be within sight, though out of rifle range, and here, by artful driving, one could always dodge the shells. As it happened, however, the enemy

¹ W. C. Anderson (I.L.P.), returned unopposed at a by-election in the Attercliffe Division of Sheffield.

² *Adventure*, p. 202 foll.

had advanced since MacDonald's cicerone had last passed this way, and when they came to the exposed section of the road, heavy rifle and machine-gun fire opened on them at once. The bonnet, windscreen and mudguards of the car were hit, but neither passenger was touched. This, of course, was an exhilarating, everyday incident to General Seeley, who is generally supposed to have been as completely destitute of fear as any soldier in any army during the entire war. And MacDonald, with his curious liking for physical danger, began to feel himself unexpectedly in his element. By a bridge, some way short of Liserne, they tumbled out into a ditch, where they were just, but only just, screened from direct fire. The French front line was four hundred yards in front of them, across the canal; the Germans were two hundred yards beyond. At that moment several batteries of French seventy-fives opened rapid fire on the German trenches, and the French infantry left their trenches for the assault. This stirring spectacle was naturally too much for General Seeley. Shouting to MacDonald to follow, he left the ditch and rushed across the bridge towards the fighting. Nothing loth, MacDonald raced after him, and together they tumbled breathlessly into a support-trench full of French soldiers, where they were all but shot out of hand as spies. However, they succeeded in explaining their identity to an officer, and watched the French capture the enemy's position. The firing died down, and Seeley reluctantly pointed out that now was the time to make an attempt to resume their interrupted journey. In the meantime, however, they had encountered a body of French Fusilier Marines, moving up into the front line, and had got into conversation with one of them, who had been wounded in the hand; and MacDonald sug-

gested that it might be more interesting to go forward with the marines. Even General Seeley, however, could not bring himself to countenance this, and, after shaking the Frenchman's unwounded hand, they raced back over the bridge, tumbled into the car and drove off at top speed to the west, with bullets singing over their heads and a few shells falling harmless on the road, now in front and now behind them. "It was wrong of me to have landed a non-combatant in such a place," reflects Lord Mottistone in retrospect, but it is evident that they both thoroughly enjoyed themselves. "It is only right to record," adds the author of *Adventure*, "that during this exciting episode Ramsay MacDonald behaved with the utmost coolness, and, indeed, suggested that we might go forward with the two wounded seamen, instead of endeavouring to return to a place of safety." And he generously paid much the same tribute, in a speech at Southampton on April 27th, 1928. MacDonald arrived at his destination, the Friends' hospital, covered from head to foot with mud—his visits to the ambulance units in Belgium seemed fated to be robbed of decorum—but in good spirits. He explained that he had fallen out of the car, and said nothing whatever of his adventure. Later, he was received by the Commander-in-Chief at St. Omer, and made an extensive tour of the front. On his return home, he paid a public tribute to the courage of the French troops, but characteristically said nothing, then or later, of having been under fire himself. The public, which knew nothing either of his views on war service or of his own attempt to serve, continued to read only the Press's occasional carefully-selected quotations from his criticisms of our war-aims, or his denunciations of the "moral flamboyancies" of war-time. It heard more and more, as the war dragged on, of the often

carping strictures on the national effort which proceeded from the I.L.P., with which he was so closely identified, and in which he was so much the most arresting figure; and gradually in the public consciousness there grew up a picture of MacDonald as the personal embodiment in their most extreme form of all the views—conscientious objection, Tolstoyan pacifism, and anti-nationalism—which were most detested by a people at war.

But it was the *third* of MacDonald's main assertions—that, if this war was not to breed endless more wars, it was at all costs necessary to keep alive the mental temper of peace—which is now the most significant for us, and was then the most dangerous for him. At its simplest, this aspect of his creed was merely a determination to continue to speak the truth. “We are standing by the old unpopular position that truth always pays a country in the end. . . . They can close the doors of public life upon us. That has been done against greater men than any of us are. But they cannot suppress us.”¹ And the object of telling the truth was, first and foremost, to preserve, somewhere and somehow, within the nation the generous, unembittered temper, the *moderation*, which alone could give birth to a genuine and lasting peace. If that spirit were not alive in England, and watching eagerly for its opportunity, the men in the trenches would have been betrayed, for the ensuing peace could never be the peace for which they were fighting. In other words, the core of MacDonald's creed was that somebody must build up a public opinion *which would be morally and mentally prepared for the supreme test of peacemaking after victory*. If that were not done, the war would be lost, however completely the soldiers might win it.

¹ *Labour Leader*, October 8th, 1914.

We have kept ourselves free of the folly of assuming that the mind of war is better than the mind of peace. We have never failed to see that unless the forces of reconstruction were mobilised in time of war they could not be mobilised at all.¹

Let us make such a strong public opinion in favour of small nationalities and open, honest diplomacy that the generous sentiments which have inspired the country at the opening of the war will, just for once, guide those who make the peace. Only those who know their histories and have studied the ways of Foreign Offices appreciate what a big task this is to be.²

That was the core of MacDonald's message—can we ignore it now? Never forget that the object of war is peace. Call no war successful until you have read the peace which ends it. In war-time, use the weapons of war-time; that is inevitable. But to talk only the language, and think only the thoughts, of war-time, that is fatal. For what, indeed, are we fighting, if not to destroy Prussian militarism? And militarism can never be cast out by militarism. How much significance twenty years have added to warnings such as these!

Moreover, there is good reason for believing that if between now and the end of the war no words pass between Germany and ourselves but those of military significance, and if the military are just left to hammer each other into exhaustion, militarism will be strengthened both in Germany and in Great Britain, whatever the result of the war may be. The very last thing which is to smash militarism is defeat in battle. Militarism rests on fear, and fear exists because the peoples do not come close enough together. . . . To democratise the Prussian franchise would be a greater security for us than to seize the whole German navy and forbid another ship of war to be built in German

¹ *Labour Leader*, December 30th, 1915. ² *Ibid.*, October 8th, 1914.

yards. To make the Reichstag a real Parliament . . . would do more for the peace of Europe than the disbanding of the German army. . . . We cannot, of course, impose a franchise . . . or a Parliament upon the German people. These are matters of self-government. But we can do the other thing. We can by employing military methods make Germany unwilling to claim self-government and indifferent to the gains of self-government.¹

Military operations alone are not to create the conditions of an abiding peace. If German militarism is to be crushed so that it is no longer to be a European menace, Germany must not be given as an inheritance from this war the spirit of revenge. The German people will rid themselves of Prussianism soon enough, provided that Prussianism is not essential to their self-respect and national pride. Socialist pronouncements on the war should therefore be characterised by international feeling and by an appreciation of just how far militarism can lead us towards peace and when the statesman should come in.²

Or, as he put it in his preface to Stewart's *Life of Keir Hardie*,

He (Keir Hardie) knew that when the clash came it could not be ended until the conditions of a settlement arose, and he joined heartily with the small group in the country who took the view that those conditions were political and not military, and that, therefore, whilst the soldier was holding the trenches, the politician should be as busy as the munition worker creating the political weapons which were to bring peace.

In short, if the British mind becomes altogether militarised, then, whoever conquers in the field, Germany will have won the war, for she will have Prussianised England. "Germany can . . . rule from London through the medium of a British Cabinet and a British war-office."³

¹ *Labour Leader*, May 6, 1915.

² *Socialist Review*, October, 1915.

³ *Labour Leader*, May 4, 1916.

This was why patriotism was not enough. As MacDonald explained in "An Open Letter to a Recruiting Socialist," once you admit that the old, secret diplomacy must be ended, it follows, if you concentrate solely on winning the war, if (as MacDonald put it) you give "purely military service," that

you are adding volume and confidence to a public opinion which will not support you when you think the time has come to change that diplomacy. . . . If the new diplomacy is not settled and organised now, the conditions of peace will be arranged by the existing diplomacy, and you will find yourself in the toils of international hate and fear, of adjustments of territory, of *ententes* and alliances, of plots and menaces, which will hamper your action in the same way as the war itself does. Your happier to-morrow will never dawn. . . . My position, as opposed to yours, up to this point is, that I wish to organise Labour opinion so that it may have a national policy ready for this peace and so that it sees quite clearly that the value of war is at best limited, and that a purely military service like yours, given during a war, sacrifices the future safety of the country to its present needs.¹

He was even prepared to plead for suspended judgment on the German atrocities. Writing in January, 1915, in an International Review, *Les Documents du Progrès*, before the publication of the Bryce *Report on the German atrocities in Belgium*, he argued that the accepted proofs were not real proofs. Those who had suffered fearful experiences were incapable of precise and accurate observation. "Such excesses have always been associated with war, and have been charged against all invading armies. But it is detestable and diabolical to make use of such stories in order to excite hatred among the peoples, and in order to cause the continuance of war."

¹ *Ibid.*

But, for MacDonald, to preserve the mental balance of peace-time, difficult though that might be, was clearly not sufficient, unless we both knew clearly what, in fact, were the objects for which we were fighting, and were alertly on the watch for opportunities of ending the slaughter and obtaining them by negotiation. "Statesmen should be as busy in watching the signs and opportunities for peace as the munition worker is in the workshops" (Speech at Blackburn, October 10th, 1915). A war of attrition, he was convinced, could not produce a permanent peace. Moreover he felt sure that, if fully instructed, the people, and particularly the fighting men, would be ready for negotiation long before their rulers. The Government's original declaration, which had spoken of "a real European partnership, based on the recognition of equal right and enforced by a common will," had inevitably soon given way to vague references to "crushing German militarism," and "fighting to a finish."

What finish? The Belgian and French borders? The Rhine? Berlin? The destruction of the German Navy? Disarmament? The dethronement of the Kaiser? The dismemberment of Germany? A new German constitution suppressing the dominance of Prussia? What?

No two men will give the same answer. The man of knowledge will smile at the answer given by the man in the street. The Navy will not reply in the same terms as the Army; the statesmen will agree with neither; no two Allies will speak in chorus. And yet, surely, considering the costs in life, in treasure, the phrases chosen to embody the determination of the nation should have some precise meaning, so that the common mind of each country may understand that of every other. As it is, we are just marching out into the unknown with Death as our guide and the world of accident before us. One day we shall meet

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Necessity in the face, and God alone knows what Necessity will say to us.

If the phrase does not contain in it any agreement amongst those who have no misgivings about the war, neither does it divide them in itself from those who have such misgivings. . . . The difference between us does not lie in the word "finish," but in our opinions as to how the finish is to be reached. One thing is certain. No finish can come from military operations alone. The man who imagines that by hammering and killing, killing and hammering, he is to bring peace upon Europe is mistaken. In this way he is accustoming the people to the habits and thoughts of force. . . . But a people beaten by force is taught to respect and fear and trust in force. We cannot get away from human nature. The "finish" cannot be one of force. That "finish" is only a pause, a "patched-up peace."

War will finish when the nations of their own initiative and free will decide mutually to remove its causes. It follows from that that those who look for peace after this war must always be ready to listen to peace proposals and be ready to negotiate. I do not mean by that that they should accept any terms (that Germany should retain Belgian soil or dominate Belgian sovereignty, for instance), but that they should consider every proposal to see if it can be made satisfactory. For this purpose secret diplomacy should be ended now. Every peace overture should be made public; for it is quite certain that the classes and the officials whose minds and policies made this war will not make peace. But the peoples will make peace and keep it if they have a chance. . . . If the peoples were free to settle it themselves, that will be long before the diplomats and the military classes, working in secret, decide to end the killing. By that time the peace desires of the peoples will have passed and sentiments of anger, bitterness, resentment, and dishonour will have taken their place. The "finish" will be reached before the diplomats and the military are satisfied, and if the democracies do not take the matter into their own hands they will be betrayed and defeated at the end of this as they have been at the end of all wars fought hitherto.¹

¹ *Labour Leader*, November 18, 1915.

To his I.L.P. audiences MacDonald did not at first go beyond sketching the general anatomy of a genuine peace. The time for more specific proposals did not come until 1917, when President Wilson was beginning to interest himself in the matter. For the moment MacDonald would only have insisted on justice for Belgium, and an international tribunal to settle all other disputes.

We must win the war, mistaken though we were to enter it, but we shall not have won the war if we make a vindictive, a militarist peace; and therefore even in war we must preserve the mental balance, the *moderation* of peace-time; and the sooner peace comes, the better peace it is likely to be—the impact of doctrine of this sort depends prodigiously upon the emphasis with which it is stated. Stress those first five words, and you have something little removed from the opinions of the masses. But let the burden of your theme be “peace,” and, fundamentally moderate though you may be, you align yourself automatically with the extremist. You are a pacifist, a pro-German, a traitor. MacDonald did his best to hold the balance reasonably even between these contrasting elements in his war outlook. It is significant indeed that sometimes, for this very reason, he would mystify his audiences. On October 10th, 1915, for example, he was speaking to a huge audience in the Prince’s Theatre in Snowden’s constituency, Blackburn. There was a tremendous reception from his supporters, the majority of the audience rising to its feet to greet him, waving hats and papers and cheering; and he spoke of how the I.L.P. had preserved “the international mind,” and of the political dangers of a fight to a finish. But he asserted unequivocally also that the I.L.P. had never believed in obstructing the conduct of the war;

and, when question-time came, he was asked more than once, and in obvious good faith, why, then, he did not appear on recruiting platforms? And at the Labour Conference of 1916 (where he was chiefly anxious to prevent a schism in the Party) some of the very delegates who cheered his speech, found themselves asking each other afterwards whether he was for the war or against it. But in the long run it was impossible for him to hold the scales even. After all, it was his business to criticise the Government—and criticism of a Government in war-time is soon confused with anti-patriotism. It was his business never to allow his fellow-countrymen to forget that the object of war is peace—and talk of peace in time of war is soon dubbed defeatism. It was his business, as passions rose, to plead for suspended judgment—and the man in the street was not inclined to distinguish a plea for suspended judgment from an attempt to whitewash the enemy. (Even when the *Lusitania* was torpedoed by a German submarine, MacDonald courageously pointed out that the German nation was not to blame; “We wait anxiously for the German people themselves to speak.”) And above all, there were his audiences, in which the extremer view was always predominant. A war-time colleague of his once observed to me that, whereas the main body of a speech by MacDonald might be a denunciation of this particular war, the peroration was apt to be a denunciation of all war. The criticism is hardly borne out by the records of the speeches themselves, which are remarkable for their balance and restraint, but it does represent the undoubted truth that, like every successful orator, MacDonald was profoundly influenced by his audience. The utterances of some of the peace advocates read now less as if they were striving to keep the lamp of goodwill

alight, than as if they were venting their natural pugnacity on their fellow-countrymen instead of the enemy. MacDonald was never one of these. He was a moderate, exhorting extremists. But he could not express himself in a vacuum. Inevitably, and properly, he addressed his audience in the language which it would understand. And, after all, was it not his first duty, as he saw it, to sustain the courage of his own people, that infinitesimal fraction of the nation which, in whatever diversity of philosophy, was united in the determination to continue to think the thoughts of peace? How *could* he hold the scales even? It is well indeed that he did not. A multitude of counsellors, ranging from the most selfless patriot to the most cynical adventurer, urged the nation to ever greater sacrifices. His suspect accents would be lost in that swelling chorus. Did he not serve his generation better by rendering audible at times the still, small voice of reason? He knew, of course, that if every one, like most of those who thought with him, had stood aloof, the nation would have been destroyed. But of that there was no danger, and accordingly it was not only defensible, it was imperative, he believed, that amidst the slaughter there should be some few who were striving for the speediest possible coming of the most permanent possible peace. This was his infinitely arduous war service, for which service of any more accepted brand must have incapacitated him. We have seen the peace come that he fought against, we live in the world it has bred. Are we ready to say that he was wrong?

* * * * *

Inevitably he was not altogether comfortable in the I.L.P. Once he was in a minority in the Labour Party, the I.L.P. had provided the obvious alternative platform,

and a diminutive, but ready-made, organisation of enthusiasts. But its war-philosophy was never genuinely his philosophy. The majority of its prominent members either believed on principle that all violence is always wrong, or, though ready, if necessary, to use violence against capitalists, would never willingly take part in what they regarded as a capitalists' war. Some saw the whole struggle as a categorical denial of the Christian religion, others as a mere conspiracy of millionaires. Statistics of armament shares jostled references to the New Testament in the columns of the *New Leader*. Both views, like all extreme doctrines, were too clear-cut and too ingenuous for MacDonald. He was never, as we have seen, a pacifist. And he knew, and said, that capitalist interests had had nothing to do with making the war, though he saw, and said, that many of them subsequently did very well out of it. By the end of 1915, he was beginning to find himself yet a little farther from what may be called the average mind of the I.L.P. In the first months of the war little had been heard of "pacifism." It was only when talk of conscription began, that a philosophy of pacifism was seriously discussed. For no tribunal would grant exemption to a man who said merely "I consider it wrong to take part in this particular war"; his only hope would be a more comprehensive creed, religious or political, which condemned all war as such. In July, 1915, there was a two-day Conference on the Philosophy of Pacifism at the Caxton Hall. In September the new No Conscription Fellowship issued a manifesto. And as, with the passage of the Military Service Act, the new Tribunals took shape, the columns of the *Labour Leader* began to supply each week the alternative arguments, religious and political, with which a conscientious non-participant might maintain

a philosophical objection to war. MacDonald himself strenuously resisted conscription, but not for these reasons. He held that conscription was not needed for winning the war; that it could be so useful to industrial magnates; that it would infallibly be prolonged when war was over; that it was the inevitable sequel to the foreign policy which had produced the war, so that its prolongation would be the infallible prelude to that policy's revival; and, in short, that it represented a victory of militarism, and therefore in a sense of Germany, in England. He disliked and denounced conscription—but not as a conscientious objector. And as the philosophy of Conscientious Objection spread and assumed coherence in the ranks of the I.L.P., he found himself, subtly but sensibly, yet a little farther from complete sympathy with its group mind. It is noticeable that, compared with Snowden, he asked relatively few questions in the House about conscientious objectors. For his strictures on conscription he found considerable support among the Labour majority, who would have nothing to do with his general attitude to the war. There was perhaps some inconsistency in opposition to conscription from a Socialist (for it might be argued, in H. G. Wells' words, that "Universal service of property, of men, in peace and in war, such are the very bones and marrow of Socialism"), but it certainly did something to lessen the distance between MacDonald and the majority of his Party—ten Labour Members in all voted against the Act. Only between him and the I.L.P. did it almost imperceptibly increase that slight but pervasive sense of intellectual discomfort. Indeed the I.L.P. itself was sometimes aware of a certain incongruity in their respective outlooks. It complained, for example, after the Labour Conference of 1916, that MacDonald had

stated their joint position too apologetically and too obscurely.

And MacDonald himself was uncomfortably aware that, into every speech or article in which he did not fully re-expound the intellectual foundations of his own faith, the bulk of his I.L.P. supporters would instinctively read their own distinctive views. In a sense, MacDonald found the I.L.P. in war-time, like the nation at large, too passionate and too confused. In a sense, it was his old problem, the extremists, over again. In a sense almost everybody—alike, the great majority which was for the war, and the small minority which was against it—was an extremist now. MacDonald, almost alone, was even now a moderate. And though the I.L.P. was seldom now conscious of his moderation, he was constantly aware of the defects which went with the virtues of their extremism. He had, it is true, inevitably noted how many of the pre-war gadflies of the farther Left were now enthusiastic supporters of the Government—"they wanted to be secure in their faith by the formation of an undiluted Socialist Party; or they wanted war upon us because we were too Liberal or were preparing to sell the Party for some office or other. What have events proved? . . . The redder the Socialist badge they used to wear, the thicker is the whitewash or bluewash they have now put upon it." The fact remained that what he sometimes called slovenly thinking, and sometimes "phraseology," seemed to him a little too common, even in the wartime I.L.P., for MacDonald to feel himself completely at home there. Too often, as at the I.L.P. Conference of 1917, he would find himself having to argue with his colleagues that some high-sounding resolution against ever taking any part in any war was scarcely worth the paper it was written on, since what they needed was,

not abstention from war when it had begun, but some practical scheme to prevent it from beginning; and too often, despite his criticisms, such resolutions would be carried. He admired and liked these men and women—many of them were old and trusted friends. He shared their sacrifices—but intellectually he was not entirely comfortable.

It was largely for some such reasons as these that, in the very first weeks of the war, he took a foremost share in founding an altogether new and *ad hoc* organisation, which came to be known as the Union of Democratic Control. From MacDonald's point of view, its chief advantages were that its membership was at once more catholic and more eclectic than that of the I.L.P. It was not confined to Socialists—indeed many of its most active members were Liberals. On the other hand, it chiefly attracted men and women with some special interest, or experience, in foreign affairs. It was both more expert, and less political, than the I.L.P. The original appeal for membership went out, in September, 1914, over the signatures of MacDonald himself, Charles Trevelyan, who had resigned from the Liberal Government, as a Junior Minister, on the outbreak of war, Norman Angell, author of *The Great Illusion*, and E. D. Morel, then widely known for his recent agitation against the atrocities in the Belgian Congo. The primary object of the Union was, as its name implies, "to secure real Parliamentary control over foreign policy," but it soon adopted three other Cardinal Points—no transference of territory without the consent of its population, an International Council to replace the old Balance of Power, and a general reduction of armaments. Later on, when the campaign for peace by negotiation gathered momentum, it was not through the I.L.P., but the better-

equipped and more comprehensive U.D.C., that MacDonald was to work on detailed proposals for peace. And it was probably on U.D.C. platforms, often shared with the I.L.P., that he felt himself most at home. It was in no sense a soft option. From the very outset, when the *Morning Post* denounced the original letter as a conspiracy instigated by the German Government, the Union earned odium and suspicion as richly as the I.L.P. The fact remained that, however strongly sentiment and old acquaintance drew him to the I.L.P., intellectually it was rather in the Union, with its clearer and more instructed thinking, that MacDonald found himself at home. With Morel, the most active protagonist of the U.D.C., a simple and enthusiastic character who had at this time a wider knowledge of European affairs than MacDonald, his personal relations were never particularly warm. Each was critical of the other, but they did not quarrel, and, like Henderson and MacDonald in the Labour Party, though they were never intimate, they worked effectively together.

Another, slightly later, war-time organisation from whose platforms MacDonald spoke—one of whose objects indeed was that there should be platforms from which he and his friends could speak—was the National Council for Civil Liberties. This too, though its prominent members were mostly Socialist and Labour, was an all-Party organisation, and included one or two Liberal Members of Parliament, as well as Dr. Clifford and the Bishop of Hereford, on its Council. It had been brought into being by the coming of military compulsion, by the violent attacks on public meetings, and by the increasingly frequent police raids on the I.L.P., the *Labour Leader* and the U.D.C. Its primary objects were to maintain the right of free speech, to reform, or if possible

to repeal, the Military Service Act, and to resist the "industrial conscription" which many trade unionists believed to be following in the train of military conscription. Peace, though at its Conferences it was apt to include a resolution on peace by negotiation, was not its proper business. And thus, although inevitably a considerable substratum of the same personnel, and the same protagonists, were to be found in it, as in I.L.P. and U.D.C., its platform was slightly more comprehensive than either of the others. For it was clearly possible to approve, and support, the war, and yet to mistrust or resist both conscription and the suppression of individual liberty. And J. H. Thomas, when he figured pugnaciously at some of the stormiest demonstrations of the Council, could claim that he had played his part at a hundred recruiting meetings. Within its limits, the Council was thus one of the links which helped to preserve the Labour Party from formal rupture.

* * * * *

Of all the various strands of opinion marshalled in these three organisations, remarkable sometimes in their diversities yet by the country at large uncritically and resentfully classed together as an anti-war campaign, MacDonald inevitably became at once, and remained to the end, the principal symbol and spearhead. For his was easily the most challenging personality. On the platform he was unrivalled. Many of his colleagues could draw no audience at all, but MacDonald's meetings were always full. A steady stream of controversy and exposition flowed from his pen—to the *Labour Leader*, to *Forward*, the Scottish Socialist weekly (for which he wrote a weekly column), to the *Socialist Review*, to *Foreign Affairs*, the organ of the U.D.C., and wherever else it could find an outlet. Moreover his views, just

because, in a sense, they were so moderate, were *dangerous*. In this country, the moderate is always more formidable to his opponents than the extremist. With out-and-out conscientious objectors the very Tribunals which sentenced them could afford to sympathise, knowing that these could never be more than an infinitesimal fraction of the nation. But MacDonald was provocatively championing a point of view which might conceivably become popular—much of which, indeed, has since become part of our thought.

And since he was thus so conspicuously the head and forefront of the offending, it was natural that the alarm and resentment of the majority should make him their special target. Countless indignant citizens, fathers and mothers of lads at the front, had never read a speech or an article of MacDonald's, yet knew that there were traitors at home, and that MacDonald was at the head of them. Every meeting a possible riot, at every meeting the booing, the jeers and the shouted insult—for a sensitive man four years of this was a sufficiently exacting trial to face; yet it was the customary lot of the public advocate of a desperately unpopular cause. So, perhaps were the closing against him of all public halls in London, and many other areas, and the tactics of a number of newspapers which, without reporting a word of his actual speeches, would attribute to him brutal or provocative sayings which they had themselves invented, and, after thus building up a bogey in place of the real man, would advertise his meetings to their public, accompanied by undisguised invitations to violence. And the constant charges of being in German pay. In November, 1918, the treasurer of the I.L.P. brought an action for libel against the Editor of the *Ilkeston Pioneer*, who had alleged in public that the Party's accounts

were irregular, and that part of its funds came from Germany. The case, which was tried before Mr. Justice Darling in the King's Bench Division, was dismissed with costs, much play being made by the defendant's Counsel with MacDonald's reference to "my German friends,"¹ and an entry in the balance sheet of "£50 per Mr. J. Ramsay MacDonald." There was the constant surveillance of the secret service also—in an open letter to E. D. Morel at the time of his imprisonment MacDonald described what had been his own experience too.

I know how the Intelligence Department has been laying snares for you; how you and I once shared the charming smiles of an *agent provocateur*, paid for from our own taxes, and how the poor thing whom we pitied came to grief when she could not ensnare us; how your letters have been opened, read, returned to their envelopes and then delivered; how officers have tampered with your staff and offered them appointments if they would give information against you; how, in short, you have been living in a glass house for years where there has been no privacy, with every action spied upon and reported, and running the risk that your most innocent and ordinary conduct might be converted and perverted into a criminal one. You will remember, perhaps, that a friend said to us three years ago: "I opposed one war, and I am not going to oppose another." With you the opposing of war was an incident; the supporting of truth was the concern. You were troubled, I thought, when I remarked of friends that "they will be fewer yet," but you left me without a reply when you observed that it was our families who bore the brunt of these things. That is only too sadly true. The children suffer with the fathers and for them.

But, beyond all such normal hostility, there was a special concentration of venom upon MacDonald. The

¹ See p. 327. MacDonald meant the German Social Democrats.

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innuendoes were launched from the most respectable sources. In a letter, attacking MacDonald's first notorious *Labour Leader* article, in *The Times* in October, 1914, Sir Valentine Chirol seized upon the use being made of extracts from it by the enemy. "Is it a mere coincidence," he asked, "that the German Chancellor himself . . . invariably bases his denunciations of Great Britain's perfidy on just the same sort of arguments which Mr. MacDonald employs? Is it a mere coincidence that, following Mr. MacDonald's lead, the whole German Press . . ." It was a short step from the obvious implications of this eminently respectable critic to the broadcast assertions, by baser, or less responsible, persons, that MacDonald was personally in the pay of the Kaiser. "In time of actual war . . . Mr. MacDonald . . . has helped the enemy state . . . to poison against his country the wells of public opinion . . . in neutral states whose attitude . . . might at any moment . . . decisively affect the issue of the war. Such action . . . cannot properly or safely be disregarded by the British Government and the British people"—if Sir Valentine Chirol could write this in *The Times* in October, 1914, it was naturally not long before anonymous scribes in meaner journals were assuring their readers that violence against MacDonald would be a service to the country. The orthodox majority of the Labour Party joined in the misrepresentation and abuse. Ben Tillett publicly asserted that MacDonald had resisted (he had in fact urged) the payment of adequate allowances to soldiers' dependents. "The shabbiest scum of Socialism" was the phrase chosen, to describe MacDonald and his friends, by the most distinguished of Socialist intellectuals, H. G. Wells. It was a Socialist, a former supporter of MacDonald's, at Leicester, who declared that "Mr.

MacDonald must find another constituency. Personally I should be glad if he would find another country. He is out of place in England." But it was Horatio Bottomley, stung by a reference in the *Labour Leader* to "Horatio Bottomley, birthplace and parentage unknown," and an article headed "Bottomley exposed" (with neither of which had MacDonald had anything to do), who published MacDonald's birth certificate prominently in *John Bull*. "Thank God," said MacDonald to Thomas, when he had seen it, "that my mother is dead, for this would have killed her." This cruel onslaught, it may be added, probably did as much to increase MacDonald's popularity in the Labour Party, even among those who heartily dissented from his views, as any other incident during the war. But what MacDonald felt most keenly and lastingly was the estrangement and hostility of old friends. And of all such petty, wounding incidents—the houses closed to him, the former associates who sneered or looked the other way—curiously enough, that which, by common consent of his friends, he took most hardly was his expulsion (by 73 votes to 24 in September, 1916) from the Moray Golf Club, in his own Lossiemouth.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

The Hillocks,
Lossiemouth.
25th August, 1915.

... I had a great time in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The public meeting was packed, every place being paid for. Hundreds were turned away and a great crowd waited on the street at the end to cheer.

They are trying to expel me from the Golf Club here and that is worrying. The place is infested by snobs and "penny gentry" in the summer. They may succeed. I would not mind very much if it were not for Alister and Malcolm

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who are also members and who of course feel it without fully understanding it. . . .

Some of my swell Tory friends are rallying round me splendidly. The old dowager Countess and her daughter are coming up next week just to show me countenance, and an aristocratic candidate (Tory) for a Scottish county wants to come and play golf with me for two days and cut everybody else.

The raid¹ is very troublesome and I have no special information about it. Morel has just sent me a telegram that the U.D.C. literature has been released. . . .

The death of Keir Hardie, in September, 1915, was a blow which he felt keenly. They had often quarrelled, but they had had much more than their political association in common. The mind and character of each was deeply rooted in Scottish pride, Scottish poverty and Scottish mysticism. And the war had drawn them close together at the end. MacDonald's moving preface to Stewart's *Life of Keir Hardie* reveals as much of himself as of Hardie.

He saw the Treaty of Versailles before 1915 was very far spent, and he was content to endure and wait. That is not how he was wounded. The deadly blow was given by the attitude of old colleagues. When he returned from his first meeting in his constituency on the outbreak of war . . . he was a crushed man, and, sitting in the sun on the terrace of the House of Commons where I came across him, he seemed to be looking out on blank desolation. From that he never recovered.

MacDonald was younger and tougher. He did recover. But he suffered greatly.

Inevitably, however, in compensation, the regard of his followers deepened into an intense personal devotion.

¹ A raid on the *Labour Leader*, on August 20.

Even the Labour majority, which rejected and resented his present views, saw the venom discharged upon him, noted that he did not flinch, and insensibly acquired a new affection and esteem for him. At the Trades Union Congress of 1915, which he attended as the year's "fraternal delegate" from the Labour Party, he was given a warmer reception than ever before—"the cheering was continuous." And when he rose at the Labour Conference of 1916, the applause "burst forth from every part of the hall; it died down only to be renewed again and again." At both Congress and Conference MacDonald and those who shared his views were a powerless minority, but the new note of fervour in his reception was unmistakable. Some of it was undoubtedly due to Bottomley's recent onslaught. More, to the natural admiration and sympathy of men who did not share MacDonald's present views, but had mostly themselves had plenty of experience of preaching unpopular creeds. And so, though MacDonald and his views remained desperately unpopular with the nation at large, his fervent supporters, reinforced by those who could respect and sympathise, though they could not agree with him, were almost always sufficient to make an enthusiastic audience for his meetings. In some places, and notably in London, after the riot at a meeting in the Memorial Hall in November, 1915, it was virtually impossible to hire halls for his meetings. But in Bradford and one or two large northern towns the I.L.P. was able to purchase cinemas, and use them for Sunday meetings. And, by one means or another, except in London, the speaking campaign was kept steadily going. Occasionally there was no opposition present, and all was enthusiasm and assent. Usually, in spite of hostile demonstrations, his meetings were a success.

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To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

3 Lincoln's Inn Fields.

October 19, 1914.

. . . I had a tremendous time at Leicester last night. They had been working for a whole week to break up the meeting, and *John Bull* came out with a special issue and placard for Leicester. There were a lot of publicans, book-makers, prize-fighters and similar gentlemen in the meeting, but they failed. I think the Branch was greatly encouraged and begins the week with new heart. . . .

Occasionally a meeting would be broken up, usually by organised and premeditated violence, often publicly instigated by the Press. At Cardiff, for example, the platform of a Conference of the Council for Civil Liberties on November 11, 1915, was swept away by an organised onslaught, led by a local Member of Parliament, which had been admitted at a side door by the police—while muscular delegates were busy holding the main door against the mob. And the meeting in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, which virtually ended the campaign in London, had been widely advertised and denounced in advance by the national Press—a letter in the *Daily Express* describing it as “an act of war against the British nation,” and adding encouragingly that “those who protest against it are as surely fighting for their country as if they were standing in the trenches.” Quantities of forged tickets gained admission for Dominion soldiers in uniform, medical students and others, all spoiling for a row. The platform was stormed before the speakers reached it, the decorations torn down, stink bombs thrown and the genuine audience assaulted. The only speeches made were those of the invaders. Afterwards the Assistant Provost Marshal described the “Teutonic accents” of some of the stewardesses (presumably Scotswomen with rolling r’s), and referred to the seditious

language of the speakers, who had in fact never so much as mounted the platform. The *Financial News* capped the incident by announcing that

Dutch news tells of the Kaiser's fury on hearing of the failure of the meeting. Peremptory orders for the immediate organisation of other "peace meetings," regardless of expense, have been sent to the secret agents of the German Government in England. Presumably the Teutonic "ladies" will attend to yell for "peace."¹

Even in war-time, Parliament had some lingering sympathy for free speech, and the Government refused to prohibit pacifist meetings or, as the Home Secretary, Mr. Samuel, put it, "even in time of war to assume the responsibility of determining what views of its own policy it ought to allow to be expressed." And occasionally MacDonald and his colleagues were able to startle the House into something like support, by accounts of incidents such as those just described. Of a debate on the Cardiff riot, which began with an Ulsterman inquiring of the Speaker how best the House could express its thanks to the Member who had broken up the "pro-German" meeting at Cardiff, MacDonald could report in *Forward* that "a House hilariously hostile had been turned into a sympathetic one, and Cardiff changed from being a joke to being a shame." But, for the most part, the four years of war were for MacDonald an arid wilderness of hostility.

From the hopeless but unending public campaign, for each episode in which a sensitive man must needs screw his fortitude up afresh, he grimly refused, tempting though it must often have been, to retire into merciful obscurity. And it was waged, of course, against a constant background of private misunderstandings and

¹ For an account of the whole incident see Mrs. H. M. Swanwick, *Builders of Peace*, p. 93 f.

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estrangements, personal abuse, anonymous letters, hints of official surveillance, and, most trying of all perhaps, the inner solitude of a man "without a close friend in the world." There were financial anxieties too; there were his children to educate, and the Press, which had hitherto provided a major source of his income, had now ceased to accept his articles. But when his fellow-directors of the National Labour Press, suspecting something of this, proposed to give him a hundred pounds in recognition of the immense amount of unpaid work he was doing for them, he declined the offer instantly. All this Iliad of troubles he could have exchanged, had he been willing, for popularity and affluence as a Cabinet Minister. No wonder that he was often depressed or irritated.

To Mrs. H. M. Swanwick.

9 Howitt Road,
Hampstead.
September 17, 1917.

You are an angel to write such a heartening letter. I do get into Ishmaelitish dumps sometimes, never the dumps of despair but the worse dumps of resentment. I know they are bad, but there is now nobody to take me out of them. Verily, I read poetry but I do not know Bridges. The lines you write from him are goodly thoughts and prayers...

I feel a return of the swinging tide but the water under us is still very shallow and the channels are badly silted up with prejudice.

What is much more surprising, however, than his occasional fits of depression, or, for that matter, than his consistent courage, is the frequency with which he was to be found in the highest of spirits. The religious fervour of his supporters was, of course, in itself an inspiration, an exhilarating revival, after the doldrums of the last years before the war, of the spirit of the



Photo. Dr. Erich Salomon.

*The dining-room at the Hillocks, Ramsay MacDonald's house
at Lossiemouth.*



Memorial to Margaret MacDonald in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

" she quickened faith and zeal in others by her life

Labour pioneers. As with most artists, his temperament was mercurial. He would write to Ivor Thomas, organiser of the Council for Civil Liberties in Wales, in acute depression—his children were down with influenza, rain was leaking into his study, he had neuritis. He would arrive at Briton Ferry, very tired and in obvious pain. And then he would address a huge and enthusiastic meeting for an hour and a half, and at the end of it he would be a new man, neuritis and fatigue seemingly things of the past. Or he would go for a walk with David Kirkwood, then interned within a five mile radius of Edinburgh, for his shop-steward Clydeside agitation, and they would start out, two dejected and almost despairing men, but soon, as they made for the Pentlands, MacDonald would be holding forth on the Scottish village they were trudging through—how beautiful, and how typical, with its burn, its manse, its Big House. And as if by magic he would have thrown off every care in the world—and lifted them from his companion too. This ability to forget the workaday world and, above all, to draw deep draughts of refreshment from nature, stood him in good stead. Another war-time companion remembers a walk from Hampstead, and how they talked Nature—it was scenery that appealed to MacDonald rather than birds or beasts—and Lossiemouth sunsets, and even broke into song; and it was only coming back down the slope from the pond on Hampstead Heath that the shades descended again, and he said, “It’s a terrible business to be beset with both sorrow and suspicion.”

He was always a great walker and he took regular holidays with congenial companions.

There in the evening, delightfully tired, tingling all over, drowsy with a pipe of slowly consuming tobacco,

sitting in front of a genial fire, too contented to go to bed, one could write the wisest book on democratic philosophy which has ever seen the light, but it would not be original. It would be borrowed from the moors and the villages. One of its great sections would be on the democratic inheritance from the past.

That was written at Craven in Yorkshire in October, 1918. In the same year he walked in Gloucestershire, and again in Oxfordshire, in the Bicester and Banbury country ("Bicester . . . is just the blank-minded John Bull. . . . But Banbury—there you have the man of mind"). These expeditions were a repeated restoration of spiritual strength.

The individual devotion of simple folk, too, was always heartening. There was the Welsh meeting, for example, before which the opposition had put the electric light out of action, and at which an assault on the platform was expected, so that they forearmed themselves with many candles and many stewards, and the local boxing champion constituted himself MacDonald's body-guard—"I don't know much about politics, but anybody who touches MacDonald to-night will do it over my dead body." And there was always the comic relief. As when Ivor Thomas heard two men abusing MacDonald in the hotel breakfast-room, and asked whether they knew him. "I wouldn't deign to associate with him," replied one of them. Later in the morning MacDonald came in with Ivor Thomas, while this man was sitting by the hotel fire, and chatted with him for half an hour, unrecognised—until the Chief Constable came in and spoke to him by name. The stranger appeared so flabbergasted that Thomas explained apologetically that he had not planned the incident. "It's all right," said the man, "but what fools we are!"

W A R

On the whole, the cheerfulness with which MacDonald faced the exacting labours, as well as the nervous strain, of his black years was remarkable. A certain taut courage was to be expected, the constant gusto was a more uncommon virtue.

To Miss Minnie Pallister.

9 Howitt Road,
Hampstead, N.W.
April 3, 1916.

. . . I do not know if you still entertain projects of Llanthony. It is an out-of-the-way place put where only dreams can reach it—and not feet. On the 24th June, I am in Port Talbot, but I am quite certain that some of the near at hand branches will write: "We see you have Sunday and Monday clear. Please give us six meetings. We would be glad to give you an opportunity of addressing three meetings on Friday too if no other branches have fixed you up for that day." I fear that gentle persuasion will reach my heart. But the fact is that I have reached that state of mind and body when I say and feel, "D——n meetings. Not another one will I take on this side of the Judgment Day." I spoke protestingly to Snowden and he was very mild. He now feels that he made a mistake and you might manage to get him for next winter.

To Miss Minnie Pallister.

The Hillocks,
Lossiemouth.
June 12, 1916.

Good Heavens! Three score and ten meetings in South Wales that week-end! I am engaged to Pontypool. It wears my ring on its finger, and you want me to desert it for a hobble skirt and a Paris hat called Cardiff. I expect that of Ivor who has no religion. But of you! What is Wesleyan Methodism and Sunday School teaching coming to? Do I behold the deterioration of futurism? Or is it the innate evil of Eve? . . . Work out more details. Check my topography as I have no map here. Propose times and redraw plans with explanation of how the impossible can be done.

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No motors will then be running and I am beastly tired of meetings and am showing it in my speeches. I want six months off the platform and it would be better to give Cardiff something in the autumn or winter.

To Miss Minnie Pallister.

9 Howitt Road,

Hampstead, N.W.

October 13, 1916.

From the wickedness of your heart you have congratulated me on my increasing age. Youth, like you, puts its mile-stones on the middle of the road so that it may keep its eyes upon them; age, like me, puts them amongst the shading weeds at the side so that it may forget them. Wait till you are fifty, bald and bent and then tell me what your feelings are when some young colt of a creature comes up hilariously, smacks you on the back and shouts: "Hullo, old woman, glad to see you getting on in years."

I am not in Ivor Thomas' pocket. In any event, he has a selection to choose from whereas you have only one—have you one in the three decker? I doubt it. Now if I went into your one, I should be crushed up with a hanky, a thimble, a needle, a powder puff, a hand mirror and perhaps other queer and unfriendly things like a C.O. manifesto.

I am nearly killed with years and labour. I hope to see you with Ivor at Cardiff. I hear of your ongoings sometimes and Ivor always exaggerates your virtues amidst Patience, Bridge and "Land of my Fathers."

The consequences of MacDonald's new political alignments—the "amazing companionships" of war-time, as he once called them—were of immense significance for the future. To contemporary spectators of the war-time scene he was far from appearing, as he begins to appear in retrospect, as the essential moderate, isolated from patriots and pacifists alike, preaching the only creed which could have ensured a lasting peace. By the general public, as ever, he was personally identified with every extravagance in the creeds he had inevitably

come to symbolise. And since he thus bore the brunt of all the onslaughts aimed at them, the war-time rebels of every brand virtually accepted him as one of themselves. The Left forgot its impatience with his strategy in the years before the war. No longer was he a mistrusted moderate; no one could suspect him now of playing for safety or for personal advancement; he was their champion, who had suffered more than any of them, the man who had led them through the fires. In 1922 they would remember this and lift him to the leadership. It was thus the war which was responsible for one of the great paradoxes of modern politics—that Ramsay MacDonald owed the premiership to the extremists. As for the Labour majority, who in 1906 had been shy of MacDonald as a dangerous Socialist doctrinaire, but between 1911 and 1914 had learnt to respect his realism and prudence, the war did not so much efface these later memories, as teach them that, in addition to his practical ability, he possessed a fire, a steadfastness and an indifference to his personal fortunes, which many of them had scarcely suspected. Moreover, the British public seldom fails to respect sincerity and courage in a public man, even when it disagrees most violently with his views; and when, after his period of eclipse, MacDonald reappeared in high places, four years after the end of the war, plain citizens began to tell themselves that this was at least a man who was prepared to sacrifice himself for his beliefs. There were other consequences too. The fact that, deeply though he respected the devotion and idealism of the war-time I.L.P., MacDonald was never altogether comfortable with its political philosophy, contributed to the further paradox that the men of the Left, whose support would ensure him the premiership, were the first to quarrel

with him after he had attained it. And those who are fond of historical precedents will not fail to notice that in the crisis of 1914 it was not the majority only which turned first to a political truce, and then to a coalition. Both in the U.D.C. and in the Council for Civil Liberties MacDonald had found it natural to co-operate with members of another Party.

* * * * *

The Labour Party did not split. Perhaps this was the most remarkable political phenomenon of the war. And it was of immense political consequence too, since, if the Left wing had been excluded now, a powerful Communist movement, though MacDonald would not have belonged to it, might have grown up after the war. All through these years, MacDonald remained Treasurer of the Labour Party. Only in 1916 was a rival candidate put up for the post; he represented majority views, but in a Conference which overwhelmingly endorsed those views, he was overwhelmingly defeated. Here was seen the wisdom of the decision of 1911; if the Treasurer had been elected by the Executive, it is possible that MacDonald might have been rejected; there were those indeed who would have liked to expel him from the Party, and Will Thorne actually moved a resolution to this effect. The strain on the Party's cohesion was sometimes formidable. Inevitably, the two wings used hard words of each other on occasion. MacDonald was constantly crossing swords with his colleagues, or complaining of the "blatant and ignorant utterances which constitute the war speeches and writings of some of the pro-war Labour champions." In the House there was soon a physical separation too. The little Pacifist group crossed the floor in June, 1915, and came to anchor on the second bench below the gangway on the Oppos-

ition side. Here sat not only MacDonald and the four I.L.P. Members, but the handful of Liberals who were working with them, Ponsonby, Trevelyan, Lees-Smith, Morel, Lambert and Outhwaite, with Sydney Arnold and two or three others as partially attached supporters. From this vantage point MacDonald could observe some of his official Labour colleagues enjoying what he described as "what looks like very congenial companionship with the Tory bloods, with whom they crack jokes and join in choruses of cheers." It was a curiously anomalous situation. The Treasurer of the Labour Party was actually sitting on the Opposition benches, while his Party was a partner in the Government Coalition. And he retained, with his fellow-rebels, the right to share the councils of the Party, against whose whole policy he was in open revolt. Naturally the Party was frequently attacked by non-members for continuing to harbour "traitors," and, within it, there would be angry scenes at Committee and Conference, where Snowden's bitter tongue was always dangerous. There were always those who would have been glad to hound "the pacifists" out into the wilderness. But the breach never quite came. Repeatedly of course, on Party Committees, MacDonald voted in a helpless and indignant minority. There is an interesting description in one of his *Forward* articles (December 9, 1916) of a majority decision to accept and work a Government measure, although, in MacDonald's view, "absurdity and impossibility were written on the face of it." "We had to stand aside, wondering what had come over our colleagues." The Labour Members went upstairs to a Committee Room "to attempt the impossible" and consider how they could best carry out the measure. Meanwhile, however, the Bill was being slaughtered

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in the House below. The Labour Members trooped down from their Committee,

and before we were many minutes in the Smoking-Room the recording tape rumbled and rattled, and slowly the announcement was spelt out, that the Bill had been withdrawn. Never a thought of consulting Labour! Never a fear that it might resent being treated as though it had no mind and no self-respect! What Labour had accepted the House of Commons contemptuously rejected. . . . It was a bitter pill for some of us to swallow, and its taste is still in our mouths.

The strain became slightly more severe when Lloyd George succeeded Asquith in December, 1916. MacDonald had admired Asquith, and could sum him up shrewdly.

Mr. Asquith is a lawyer in mind as well as by profession. His great genius is shown in overcoming difficulties without settling them. No man can postpone the evil day with such success as he can. But he only postpones it. . . . Mr. Asquith, however, has a keen chivalrous sense of not only standing by his colleagues, but of taking upon himself the blame which really belongs to them, and every one who has come in contact with him has, in spite of his shy reserve, come to regard him with something akin to personal affection. In hard Anglo-Saxon unimaginative intellect, he is head and shoulders above his colleagues, and if he had more force of character and heaviness of hand, I doubt if the futilities of our Foreign Office would have resulted in war. But he never could control colleagues. They made trouble and he spent his time cleaning up the mess.¹

The Labour Party, of course, had supported the Asquith coalition. To support the Lloyd George coalition, however, seemed to MacDonald to be quite another matter. For one thing, with Asquith and his followers outside, this was not a genuine National Government.

¹ *Forward*, December 9, 1916.

When MacDonald penned his strictures on this aspect of the new administration, few things can have been farther from his thoughts than that one day the rôles would be reversed, and that he would have to listen to almost exactly the same reproaches from some of the very colleagues he was now criticising.

Whilst I now write, the new Government is being formed, and, alas! that I have to write it, the Labour Party by a *majority*—emphasise the majority, please, Mr. Printer—has decided to go in. It cannot plead national necessity or even national service, for the official Liberal Party with Mr. Asquith at its head is staying out—and no one can accuse them of deliberately deserting the country. It is not a National Government but a Party one, and a very bad Party one at that. . . . The only excuse which the Labour Party can possibly offer for joining is that it is getting more offices and some semi-pledges as to programmes. But the very constitution of the Labour Party prevents it from accepting office for such reasons. We might have had office long before the war started; we might have had pledges as to programmes ten years ago, but the Labour Party was formed on the assumption that Labour could serve the working classes far more effectively as an independent influence than as part of a Government. . . . I have disagreed with the policy of the majority of my colleagues since August 1914, but I have never believed that they were abandoning their principles. I believed they could quite properly support the war; I believed they could quite properly join the Coalition. I did not believe they were really helping the country, though mere appearance was all in their favour and against me; and I was certain that they were making themselves responsible for Cabinet actions which were wrong and which a Labour Party ought to take no responsibility—either direct or indirect—for. Our differences were all on the surface, however irritating and dangerous they may have been, and they did not permanently jeopardise Party unity when we returned to ordinary political life. The condition to-day, however, is not quite

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that. The majority of the Party has now taken a decision which means that under normal circumstances it is prepared to ally itself with other Governments, that the policy of independence is no longer the policy of the Party, and that it must support other Parties at elections, providing (sic) those Parties have acceptable items on their programmes.¹

The ties between the two sections wore thin, but, somehow, they held. Partly the miracle was worked by political machinery—by all the Committees on which members with opinions of differing shades could thrash out practical problems together, without raising their theoretical differences. In particular, there was the War Emergency Workers' Committee, whose executive included the widest possible range of conflicting views—Henderson, MacDonald, Webb, Hyndman, Smillie were all members of it. The Committee met two or three times a week at first, and seldom less than once a week while war lasted, and did some useful work on profiteering, dependents' allowances, maternity and welfare centres, the feeding of school children and similar problems; indeed it did much to enable Labour to secure many of its peace-time demands *sub rosa*, so to speak, so that the general standard of life of the wage-earners actually rose, while that of almost the whole of the rest of the nation fell, in war-time. None the less, perhaps its most valuable service was to provide the sharply divided wings with concrete problems at which they could work in harmony. Not that even here all was always harmony.

To Mrs. Bruce Glasier.

3 Lincoln's Inn Fields.
(N.D.)

. . . I went to a Conference where I knew I was to see three of the women and intended to talk the matter over

¹ *Forward*, December 16, 1916.

with them. Miss M—— at once went into hysterics, Miss B—— turned into a flashing dagger, and Miss P—— became offensive. I discussed the position with M—— however on leaving the place and then wrote her a letter, a copy of which I enclose.

At the next meeting of the Workers' War Emergency Committee Miss P—— made a most offensive attack upon me of a personal character and Miss M—— again in hysterics declared that if the women's workrooms were closed I should be to blame and went on to talk of resignation. It was a painful exhibition and the Trade Unionist and Co-operative delegates sat dumb, but several of them spoke to me afterwards expressing their indignation. For the last two years Miss P—— has been complaining to me that I do not take her into my confidence. I have tried several times to remove her impressions but have found it to be impossible. . . . When I talk to her she simply nags at me the whole time and thinks nothing of sitting for an hour suffusing that slow magnificence of atmosphere which is so hard for me to breathe. The other day I asked if she would come and talk over a project to get together a woman's conference on the war, and although we agreed on essentials she wrangled over little points about representation and at the end was making precisely the same remarks as she did at the beginning. This lasted over an hour and oh! I was tired at the end. I am really sorry right to the bottom of my heart. I want things to go better but they will not go better. . . . How often I have wished that amongst these three or four women was one who could be treated on terms of equality, who would not splutter and nag and drive me right into my shell within five minutes of starting an interview, who would curse me in a friendly way to my face or even behind my back, if it were done in a friendly way. . . . For you to come up with the youngsters and the person¹ would really be very nice. When I am too impatient about explanations you would give me a great drubbing and in the end discover that I really did not know that I seemed impatient at all, but was just tired of the inn and wanted to go on my way. . . .

¹ Bruce Glasier.

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But the chief credit for maintaining the precarious unity of the Party, with all which that was to mean for the future of British politics, must go to the leaders, and particularly to Henderson, MacDonald and Thomas. The danger, they all saw, was the reappearance of precisely the old cleavage between I.L.P. and trade unions, deeper and now probably permanent. Patiently and wisely, they were looking beyond the end of the war. Schism now would mean the end of the Labour Party. If that instrument, so illogical, so effective, so painfully forged, were powerless to face the problems and the opportunities which they foresaw when the war was over, British politics would inevitably be laid waste by a growth of sterile extremism—might indeed, as in so many other countries, have followed the primrose path of violence to civil strife and the extinction of democracy. The men whose courageous common sense foresaw and forestalled this disaster served their country well. Here Henderson played a particularly generous part. He was now the chief official figure in the Party, and if MacDonald and his friends had been driven out of it, he might have expected to remain the chief figure. But he threw the whole of his great influence into the balance against a breach. As a Cabinet Minister, he bore the odium of every unpopular Government decision in the eyes of the Party—particularly after the Conference of 1916, which had instructed him to remain in the Cabinet, to whose policy on the dominating issue of conscription the Party had just declared itself firmly opposed; he was the special target of the impatience of the I.L.P.; the Right half-suspected him as a Minister, and frequently resented his indulgence to the Left; he was harassed by anxiety for his three sons fighting in the line—yet his patience was never exhausted.

J. H. Thomas, though he had been a pillar of the recruiting campaign, fought doughtily for the same ends. Before the celebrated Cardiff meeting of the Council for Civil Liberties, on November 11, 1915, was broken up, he had had time to say:

I am here primarily because I am not going to be a party to those who are trying to drive out of our movement men who have given their best years to the cause of Labour. I, as you know, take an entirely different view of the war to MacDonald, but do you think I am going to stand by and allow those who to-day enjoy the plums that he created for them, because he is not prepared to follow the mob, to hound him out of public life! Not while I have got a voice, not while I have got power, not while I have got influence will I allow that.

And MacDonald, too, of course, strove steadily to prevent a cleavage. From time to time he would write in the *Labour Leader*,¹ urging the I.L.P. to be patient; "the Labour alliance" must not be sacrificed. At Labour Conferences, where the majority was against him, it may have been in his interest to eschew the bitterness of Snowden, and stress the ultimate objectives which united the whole Party—"in the name of everything they held sacred, in the name of everything they believed in, in the name of everything they had hoped for, let this be a purely passing affair. . . . Let them go out from the Conference . . . determined to go through the dark days, but equally determined that when they were over, back they would come together in the bonds of co-operation to fight the common enemy as enthusiastically and successfully as they had fought him before." (Labour Conference, 1916.) But it was a very different story at the Conferences of the I.L.P., where it was his opponents

¹ e.g. January 18, 1917.

who were in a minority, and his supporters who were thirsting to excommunicate "the patriots." Here the delicate rôle of peacemaker, played by Henderson or Thomas in the larger organisation, fell to him. At the Conference of 1916, there was a resolution threatening to withdraw support from Clynes and Parker,¹ the two I.L.P. Members of Parliament who were supporting the Government. MacDonald rose, and gravely asked whether the only test of Socialism was a man's attitude to the war, and the resolution was abandoned without being put to a vote.

* * * * *

During the last two years of the war, a startling change developed in the temper of the Labour Party, and in MacDonald's relation to it. 1917 had opened gloomily for him. Lloyd George was in the saddle, and Labour, with Henderson in the inner War Cabinet of five, and two other Ministers of Cabinet rank, was in full co-operation with him. In January, though there was trouble at the Annual Conference over the shop stewards movement and the Clydeside deportations, the Party declared itself unequivocally for the Government, for a fight to a finish, and against the International. A little later, the Executive decided to send delegates to a Conference of Allied Socialists at Paris, and was then seized with sudden misgivings and decided not to. Everything in fact appeared to be proceeding according to plan. And then, in March, came the Russian revolution. From this tremendous event there flowed for MacDonald two distinct series of consequences, each of immense significance. One plunged him at first into a sequence of grotesque and ambiguous episodes, which yet further discredited him with the general public, and then

¹ The I.L.P. disavowed Parker when he accepted minor Government office in 1917.

prolonged far beyond the end of the war, would launch him on the old struggle with extremism in a new form, and enable him to leave his most lasting impress on the history of his Party, and perhaps of his country. The other was to transform the war-views of many of his colleagues into something very much more like his own. During the last eighteen months of the war, accordingly, MacDonald would find himself at once nearer to his Party and farther from the nation.

It is essential to remember that the Russian revolution of March, 1917, was the *first* Russian revolution, the revolution of Kerensky, and the moderates. The second revolution, the revolution of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, did not come until November. For years after the war, MacDonald's welcome of Kerensky's revolution was quoted against him as if it had been extended to Lenin's. But Kerensky, and the bloodless revolution of March, was a very different affair. The new Russian Government proceeded to proclaim that it was fighting for a peace without imperialism and without annexations, and to announce an ambitious programme of civil and religious liberty. Here was something to suit every shade of opinion in the British Labour Party. All welcomed the apparent arrival of democracy. Alliance, in the fight for liberty in the west, with the rigid oriental despotism of the Romanoffs had never been an agreeable pill to swallow. The Tsar, moreover, was generally supposed to have had strong German sympathies. And so MacDonald and his friends saw in the Russian disavowal of imperialism, indemnities and annexations a long step towards an early, negotiated and democratic peace, while the bulk of the Party believed that Kerensky and democracy had at last given the dispirited Russian troops something

worth fighting for, so that Russia would be not only a more reputable, but a more effective, ally. At the April Conference of the I.L.P., MacDonald moved a resolution of enthusiastic congratulation to the Russians, and said that "a sort of spring-tide joy had broken out all over Europe." In a debate in the Commons on May 16, he made the events in Russia the text of a fervent appeal for a clear statement of British war aims. But already he had detected the ominous prospects that Kerensky and his Mensheviks might be submerged in darker forces. Much, he believed, would depend upon the attitude of the allies, and particularly of Britain, to the present Government.

. . . The effect of it all is this: If we cannot establish a complete sympathy between ourselves and Russia we are facing the grave danger of Russia making a separate and an independent peace with Germany. The other danger is the internal danger. At the present moment there are forces in Russia making for internal disruption, and they are very strong and very powerful and serious, and if the Russian people go back into chaos, particularly armed chaos, Russia is not going to be of much use in establishing democratic peace at the end of the war. Therefore I hope it will be part of our Government's policy to make Russia understand us, and also to help the Russian Revolution to maintain itself against its internal foes. . . .

And he went on to plead for participation in the Socialist Conference at Stockholm, of which we shall hear more in a moment.

Next day the *Labour Leader* announced a Conference to be held at Leeds on June 3, one week before the projected meeting at Stockholm. The invitation to the Leeds Conference was signed by representatives of the I.L.P., including MacDonald and Snowden, and of the

British Socialist Party. The *Labour Leader* headed its column "Follow Russia!"—a caption destined to be repeatedly used against MacDonald as evidence that he had personally planned a British revolution, but in fact clearly referring to a passage in the official invitation to the Conference which ran:

Just as the Russian democracy has taken the most significant steps in favour of an International peace, so must the democratic forces in every country strive to emulate their magnificent example. If the Russian people receive no sympathetic response to their call for an International peace from the people of the allied countries, they may be drawn into a separate peace with the Kaiser's reactionary Government.

And when a later message over the same signatures, on May 31, prophesied that the Leeds Conference "will begin to do for this country what the Russian revolution has accomplished in Russia", it is obvious that what MacDonald, and indeed probably all the signatories, intended was an effort to impel their own country towards an early, democratic peace and further resistance to war-time encroachments upon civil liberties. It is true that MacDonald had strange, revolutionary bedfellows at this time—"the amazing companionships" which were the inevitable corollary of "the forfeited confidences" of the war years—and it is probable that even in the early summer of 1917 some of them read more into imitation of Russia than he did. But the full determination of the war-time effort to associate MacDonald in particular with anything which could discredit him may be gauged from the fact that, long after the war was over, in his *War Memoirs*,¹ Mr. Lloyd George, though he says nothing of Snowden, who was

¹ IV, 1906.

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not only also a signatory but Chairman of the I.L.P., could write of "Mr. Ramsay MacDonald who in the Manifesto of Aims of the Leeds Conference, which he had a leading part in summoning, had declared that its purpose was *to make this country like Russia.*" The italics are mine.

But this is not the end of the story of the Leeds Conference. The meeting, when the day came, was large, and tumultuously enthusiastic. The first resolution hailed the Russian revolution, the third (overlooking the fact that W. S. Sanders, one of the official Labour delegates sent out by the Government to Russia, had already reported a rigid censorship there) exhorted our Government to imitate the Russians in establishing complete liberty. But it was the second and fourth resolutions which led to further, and remarkable, consequences. The second welcomed the Russian Provisional Government's Declaration of its war aims, and pledged support to its renunciation of annexations and indemnities. During the discussion of this resolution, a certain Captain Tupper, of the Seamen's Union, a prominent opponent of the views of the I.L.P., inquired who, if there were to be no indemnities, would compensate the families of British merchant-seamen who had been killed or injured by German submarines. His further remarks were drowned by loud cries of "Let the shipowners pay," and Mr. Emanuel Shinwell, after denying Tupper's right to speak for the seamen, said that the real enemies of British seamen were, not German seamen but British shipowners. But Captain Tupper, though silenced for the moment, did not have long to wait for his revenge. A few days later, MacDonald, F. W. Jowett, M.P. and Albert Inkpin, of the British Socialist Party, all of whom had signed the Leeds

invitation, were to sail from Aberdeen for Russia. They were members of a joint delegation from the Labour Party, the I.L.P. and the British Socialist Party, which was to visit the Provisional Government at Petrograd. The British authorities had had considerable misgivings about authorising the journey. But the Russians, who were still our allies, had asked for some more congenial spokesmen of British Labour than the representatives (Will Thorne, James O'Grady and W. S. Sanders) already sent out by the War Cabinet, and had particularly suggested MacDonald; and Sir George Buchanan, the British Ambassador to Russia, (after hearing from Vandervelde and O'Grady what MacDonald's views actually were) and Arthur Henderson, who was in Petrograd just now at the request of his Cabinet colleagues, had agreed in endorsing the request for MacDonald—"the proceedings of the Russian extremists," Sir George naïvely adds in his Memoirs, "might, we hoped, serve as an object lesson to him." And it was always possible that the orthodox majority-delegation at any rate might do something to revive the flagging war-spirit in Russia. And so the British Government decided to authorise the journey, and issued passports to all the delegates. But Captain Tupper had still to be reckoned with. Havelock Wilson's Seamen's Union, of which he was an official, had no sympathy with pacifism—on their minesweepers and cargo steamers its members were virtually on continuous active service—and throughout the war, assisted by such bodies as the British Workers' League or the National Socialist Defence Committee, its leaders made repeated attempts to organise some means of expressing the patriotic sentiments of the average British wage-earner, who, they thought, was both misled and misrepresented by the Labour Party

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and the Trade Union Congress. Accordingly Tupper was assured of a ready response when, seething with indignation, he arrived in Aberdeen to tell the crew of MacDonald's ship that the officials of their Union had been grossly insulted at Leeds, and that the pacifists there had openly jeered at the proposal to compensate the dependents of British seamen killed and injured in the war. The crew promptly declined to sail, if MacDonald, Jowett and Inkpin were to be passengers. One sailor shouted, "I'm a Lossiemouth mon, and I'm telling yer we'll no carry such folk!" G. H. Roberts, of the Labour Party's delegation, and others, did their best to mediate, and the irate Tupper was so far mollified as to consent to call off the strike, if MacDonald and his two Leeds colleagues would express their regret that the seamen's representatives had not been given a hearing there, and would agree that Germany ought to be compelled to recompense the relatives of British seamen, killed or injured in a submarine campaign which was contrary to international law. MacDonald and the others were ready to agree to these terms, but eventually Tupper announced that, even so, he found the seamen still implacable. He wired to the Prime Minister that, if a warship were used for the delegates, there would be a general strike of merchant-seamen. All this meant a delay of several days. The Government, as was its wont, had sent down a couple of detectives to watch MacDonald and Jowett. The story is told that early one morning MacDonald started off to walk into the country, leaving Jowett behind. Behind him, at a discreet distance, plodded one of the detectives. As dusk was falling, MacDonald reappeared, pleasantly tired after a thirty mile walk. Behind him, at a considerably greater distance than before, limped an exhausted and

famished detective. Next morning, MacDonald set out again. This time the pursuit fell to the second detective, whose legitimate apprehensions were somewhat allayed by the illusion that no man would willingly walk sixty miles in two days. He did not know MacDonald. Once more, as evening drew on, the shadowed strode springily home after a brisk thirty mile tramp, the shadower dragged himself painfully in, several minutes later. Fortunately for the now footsore and despairing representatives of the Law, MacDonald was too busy to walk next morning. . . . Before abandoning the Russian project, he put a long-distance telephone call through to the Prime Minister—after all they were travelling with Government passports, and on an errand which might well render valuable assistance to the allies, and Mr. Lloyd George had assured him, the night before he started north, that “if there was any trouble, he would communicate with the Admiralty, and told me how I could get him on the telephone”.¹ Long-distance telephone conversations are not always as intelligible as they might be even to-day, and in June, 1917, Mr. Lloyd George found this particular specimen “faint, disjointed, disrupted and incoherent.” He explained, however, as best he could, that he could do nothing. And so the delegation did not sail, for when it became apparent that MacDonald, Jowett and Inkpin were to be held up, Carter and Roberts, MacDonald’s fellow-delegates from the Labour Party, decided that they would not go either. What consequences, for Russia and for Europe, ensued from the incident at Aberdeen, who shall say? Next month Snowden, the Chairman of the I.L.P., made an eleventh hour effort to persuade the Government to assist MacDonald and

¹ *Forward*, May, 29 1920.

Jowett to reach Russia. But Barnes, who was told to see what he could do, soon reported that it was hopeless—the seamen's union was adamant, while to send these voyagers on a cruiser might, Mr. Lloyd George said, have provoked a mutiny. If the all-powerful war-time Government had really wanted to get these men to Russia, it would scarcely have submitted so tamely to these not very formidable obstacles; and, in point of fact, it doubtless derived a good deal of quiet enjoyment from the spectacle of MacDonald hoist, as *Punch*'s cartoonist put it, with his own petard. Indeed it is obvious that the Prime Minister's glow of satisfaction had not completely worn off, even when he described the incident in his *War Memoirs*, a good many years later. As for the general public—which readily forgot, if it ever knew, that MacDonald was to have travelled with a Government passport, and at the suggestion of the British Ambassador in Russia—it had no difficulty in fitting the incident into its mental picture of the arch-villain of the war-time scene. MacDonald had been secretly stealing off, to conspire with Russian revolutionaries for a dishonourable peace, and the honest seamer had detected him and foiled the plot. That was all.¹

But the fourth of the Leeds resolutions was the most alarming. This called upon the constituent bodies to establish Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils everywhere in order to work for peace, and complete the political and economic emancipation of International Labour. This certainly smelt somewhat like sedition. It was W. C. Anderson who moved the resolution. It was not intended, he said, to be subversive of military discipline though he did not explain how, without subvertin

¹ This account of the Aberdeen incident is compiled from a variety of sources including the *Labour Leader*, *Forward* and Captain Tupper's recent Autobiograph *Seamen's Torch*.

discipline; serving soldiers could become active members of a political body whose object was to oppose the Government. "Workmen and soldiers must join hands"—and this, he asserted, would not be revolutionary, unless "the conquest of political power by a disinherited class" was revolution. Writing four days after the Conference, Snowden insisted that the task of combining "some of the activities of the various Labour and Democratic bodies in a Workmen's and Soldiers' Council will have to be taken in hand at once." And on June 21st the original signatories of the invitation to the Conference invited thirteen named areas to hold meetings, in order to elect representatives to serve on a central Provisional Committee of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Council; there was already a Secretary with an address in Duke Street, W.C.2. The thirteen districts duly did their best. In London (where the Brotherhood Church, Kingsland, was wrecked in the process), at Newcastle and at Swansea their meetings were violently assailed and broken up by members of the public. At Norwich, where the inhabitants in general were unaware that the meeting was taking place, all passed off peaceably. In Manchester no hall could be obtained, and a meeting was held at Stockport, where police protected the delegates from several determined assaults. The Southampton Conference, too, had to be held privately and in another town. The only soldiers who had appeared at any of these meetings came to break them up. But in Glasgow, where the Conference was "proclaimed" as illegal by the Government, a large demonstration of protest was successfully held in the open air. Kirkwood, Maxton, Wheatley, Gallacher and MacDonald all spoke, and MacDonald, who always felt passionately for liberty of opinion, said that if the Secretary for Scotland suppressed

THE LIFE OF JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD

free speech he made constitutionalism a farce, and his orders should be treated with contempt. After this inauspicious prelude, the movement for Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils withered away. Already, after the London fiasco, W. C. Anderson had virtually proclaimed its demise by telling an interviewer¹ that he and his colleagues now felt that it would be best to obtain the Government's consent to the formation of the Councils, before proceeding further. And at its Conference next year, the I.L.P., which had inaugurated them as portents of such high significance, simply omitted to mention the Councils altogether. In his *Autobiography*, Lord Snowden dismisses them, almost jocularly, as trifles of the utmost unimportance. Were they intended to be such? Or were they, as Mr. Lloyd George, and many others, believed, at least the flying of a highly significant kite, a potential revolution, indeed—a revolution which failed to materialise? "Had the workmen rallied to their proposal of establishing a Soviet in Britain on Russian lines," writes Mr. Lloyd George,² "then the Leeds meeting would have inaugurated a British revolution and Mr. MacDonald would have been our Kerensky. That is why public opinion took alarm." Certainly here, more than at any other time, MacDonald's inevitable war-time association with the farther Left placed him in an equivocal light. But what, in retrospect, is really surprising is, not that an ambiguous incident should have occurred, but that there should not have been more of them. "Amazing companionships" can hardly fail occasionally to produce amazing consequences. For MacDonald, the Leeds Conference meant an attempt to force our Government to imitate the first Russian revolution, by renouncing imperialist aims and

¹ *Manchester Guardian*, July 30, 1917. ² *War Memoirs*, IV, 1895.

working for a speedy and democratic peace, an attempt, too, to compel it to withdraw its restrictions on civil liberty. One or two of his fellow-signatories, and some of the delegates, may have glimpsed revolution lurking behind the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils; but if so, they were of that brand of misty-minded enthusiasts who regularly mistake their own emotions for popular movements. MacDonald was a realist through and through; after three years of ostracism, he understood the present temper of the nation as clearly as any man living; he could not possibly suppose that the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils of Leeds would usher in a British revolution. Revolution, moreover, was in any case the embodied contradiction of his entire political philosophy. Inevitably, however, he had provided his critics with a weapon which they did not fail to use against him. Fresh fuel was heaped upon the flames of public suspicion. And inevitably, once again, it was MacDonald who became the arch-villain of the piece. Mr. Lloyd George's observations, penned by an elder statesman when passions had had ample time to cool, more than a decade after the event, are still typical both of the remarkable concentration of hostility on MacDonald, and the extraordinary perversions of the time. "Mr. Ramsay MacDonald," he writes¹—there is no mention of Snowden, who was Chairman of the principal convening body, of Anderson, the mover of the resolution, or of any other signatory—

thought it would be better for him to be out of England when the Leeds resolutions to set up revolutionary machinery on the Russian model were put into operation. His part of the business was accomplished. He had helped to summon the meeting. He had delivered a resonant

¹ *War Memoirs* IV, 1997 f.

speech to the delegates. Action was not in his line. So he decided to be out of the way. He resolved to visit Russia and Stockholm.

The observant reader will have noticed, although he certainly would not gather as much from Mr. Lloyd George's narrative, that there had been only one resolution "to set up revolutionary machinery" at Leeds, and with this MacDonald's "resonant speech" had had nothing whatever to do. Also that, so far from suddenly "resolving to visit Russia," to suit his private convenience and in order "to be out of the way," like some capricious peace-time tourist on a pleasure cruise, MacDonald was going as a representative of the Labour Party, selected a fortnight before the Leeds Conference, and summoned by a personal invitation from the Russian Government, which had been endorsed, first by the British Ambassador and then by Mr. Lloyd George's own Cabinet.

The first obvious effect of the Russian revolution on MacDonald's personal fortunes may thus have been to accentuate the suspicion with which he was regarded by the general public. The second, however, was to be a sudden and unexpected narrowing of the gulf which separated him from his Party. Here Henderson advances to the front of the stage. He had been sent on a special mission to Petrograd by his Cabinet colleagues at the end of May, 1917. In Petrograd he had done his best to encourage the Provisional Government to maintain its flagging war effort. He had also elaborately discussed with Albert Thomas, the French Socialist Minister, who was also in Russia, the *pros* and *cons* of accepting the invitation of the Petrograd Soviet to an International Socialist Conference at Stockholm, for the discussion of war aims. In May, Mr. Lloyd George, in a telegram to

Albert Thomas, had on the whole shown himself in favour of allowing British Socialists to go, on the ground that a German delegation would be there, and that it was desirable for the allies to be represented too. Provided that the allied Socialists were not peace-at-any-price men, they might not only help to keep Russia in the war but might enlighten the Germans as to British war aims, and as to the aims of their own rulers. In Russia Henderson gradually came round to the same view. Only contact with British and French Socialists was likely to keep the Russians from abandoning the war, and save them from defeat by their own extremists. He came back resolved to urge the Labour Party to this course. On July 25th, he pressed on the Labour Executive the view that participation in the Conference was the best chance of saving Russia from the Bolsheviks and the Germans, and succeeded in persuading it to summon a special Conference of the Party, to decide the issue one way or the other, on August 10th. On July 27th he crossed to Paris, with MacDonald and Wardle, Treasurer and Chairman of the Party, to confer with French and Russian Socialists on the Stockholm plans. By August 1st he was back in London, well pleased with the results of the visit. MacDonald seems to have returned from this expedition apart from his colleagues. It so happened that the present Archbishop of Canterbury, then Archbishop of York, was returning by paddle-steamer from Boulogne, after a visit to the allied Commanders, at this time. He has been good enough to describe to me how, as he was standing on the deck—the hawser had parted, the paddles had begun to move—he was surprised to see a gangway hurriedly thrown across and some one, or something, closely surrounded by several men, being huddled on board. What was it, he wondered—a horse,

a cow? He went to look. It was MacDonald. The Archbishop received a powerful impression of the intense forlornness of that figure. Who could have supposed that in less than seven years he was to be Prime Minister?

Meanwhile Henderson was discovering that the Cabinet and the Prime Minister were now stubbornly opposed to the Stockholm project. They were alarmed at the prospect of British Socialists hobnobbing with Germans in a neutral country, and had been irritated by Henderson's having gone to Paris. A Cabinet Minister, they felt, should not have made such an expedition without consulting his colleagues, and in company with a critic of the war, like MacDonald, to discuss arrangements for an International Conference of which his own Government did not approve, and to which all the allied Governments were opposed. Here in fact Henderson's dual rôle as Cabinet Minister and Secretary of the Labour Party were beginning to conflict, as sooner or later such dual rôles always must. There followed the once celebrated "door-mat" incident. On the day of his return from Paris, Henderson was kept waiting outside the Cabinet room for an hour, while his colleagues discussed his conduct inside. That evening, in a heated debate in the House, he gave as one of his reasons for having gone to Paris his determination "to assist in keeping the honourable member for Leicester right." But Henderson had been genuinely impressed by the case for Stockholm, as well as irritated by the door-mat episode. He was moving painfully towards a new orientation. But his mind moved slowly, and on the eighth, when there was a Cabinet meeting, he seems to have given, not only Mr. Lloyd George, but all the eight other Ministers present, the impression that he had abandoned Stockholm.

himself and believed that the coming Labour Conference would reject it too. When, two days later, the Conference met, however, Henderson astonished the world by coming down, after a full summary of the arguments for and against the Stockholm project, fair and square in favour of it. Moreover, the burden of his argument was that "every country should use its political weapon to supplement its military organisation." It is true that, as the *Labour Leader* complained, he added "if by so doing it can defeat the enemy," instead of, as the I.L.P. would have preferred, "if by so doing it can bring about a speedy peace." Nevertheless it was borne in upon his audience, with a shock of surprise, that Arthur Henderson, of the inner War Cabinet, had begun to talk something strangely like the language of MacDonald. MacDonald himself, needless to say, supported Henderson, amidst a volley of derisive interjections from Will Thorne and others, and provoked an uproar by referring to "our German friends" (he meant the Social Democrats). The Conference accepted Henderson's advice by a card vote of 1,846,000 to 550,000. Next day Henderson resigned from the Cabinet. The Prime Minister had several complaints against him, of which the most serious was that, though a Cabinet Minister, he had not disclosed to the Conference that his Cabinet colleagues differed from him on the Stockholm issue, so that his audience must have assumed that he was speaking with Government authority. And it is true that, at an adjourned session of the Labour Conference on August 21st, when it was known that Henderson had spoken for himself alone, and that the Government did not intend to issue passports for Stockholm, the previous decision was only reaffirmed by the narrow margin of 1,234,000 votes to 1,231,000. And both Conferences

showed themselves determined to exclude the Socialist societies from representation at Stockholm. Nevertheless the fundamental reason for Henderson's resignation lay deeper than the difference with the Cabinet over the Stockholm project. It was partly, as he said in his letter of resignation, that "retention of the post of Secretary to the Labour Party was no longer compatible with my membership of the War Cabinet"; but, even more, it was that Henderson's own views on the war were changing. He was still, and would remain, substantially divided from the bulk of the I.L.P., with its powerful pacifist prejudices. He was still determined to win the war, but he was now increasingly insistent on "the political weapon." "We seek a victory," as he put it next January, "but we do not seek a victory of a militarist or diplomatic nature." He had moved close, very close, to MacDonald. Indeed if MacDonald had not spent the first three years of the war speaking from I.L.P. platforms as the best-hated man in Britain, and Henderson most of them as an ultra-respectable Cabinet Minister, they might now perhaps have seen completely eye to eye.

In any case Henderson now powerfully reinforced MacDonald's central position, between the Left's demand, on almost any terms, for the speediest possible peace, and the Right's desire, at whatever cost, for the completest possible military victory. Nor (though in the *Labour Leader* Snowden ungenerously represented him as a reluctant spokesman of views which were not genuinely his own) should Henderson's influence be underestimated. He was much more *obviously* a man of the centre than MacDonald. Just now both their political associations and their public reputations made MacDonald appear to stand farther to the Left, and Henderson farther to the Right, than was in fact the case. But

together they were a combination strong enough to swing Labour over towards the ideal of a reasonable peace-settlement by negotiation. They had not actually joined forces. Henderson was still of the majority—he supported the Government, though he had left it; MacDonald of the minority—for an amendment which MacDonald moved in the House on July 26th, 1917, there voted only three out of thirty-seven Labour Members and sixteen out of two hundred and sixty Liberals. Only, more and more, Henderson was speaking the language of MacDonald; and this meant that MacDonald helped Henderson to gain the ear of the Left, and Henderson helped to lower the barrier between MacDonald and the Right.

During the latter half of 1917 events seemed to be moving in their favour. At the Trade Unions Congress in September, though Stockholm was formally abandoned, the delegates warmly applauded Henderson's defence of the notion of consulting with the German minority Socialists. Immediately afterwards, the executive of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress resolved to draft an agreed statement of war aims—which was exactly what MacDonald had long been urging. Before the draft could be submitted to a Joint Conference of Trades Union Congress and Labour Party in late December, several unexpected events had made the public formulation of war aims a less formidable project. On November 29th, for one thing, Lord Lansdowne's celebrated letter, pleading for a revision and restatement of war aims, appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*. It contained the core of what MacDonald had himself been saying since August, 1914, echoed, after more than three years of carnage, from a far less suspect quarter. At last men of unassailable political respectability were

beginning to realise, as he had realised from the first, the sovereign importance of never ceasing, in the heat of war, to think of peace. Perhaps it was possible, even now, that a substantial minority of the nation might be morally prepared for the supreme test of peace-making. He welcomed the letter enthusiastically. "I agree," he wrote,

with the bulk of the letter. It raises the vital points at issue; it touches all the difficulties of our problem. But I welcome its spirit most of all. It sets the balderdash of the "knock-out" blow on one side; it subordinates military success to reasonable diplomacy; it brings thoughts of the future in to calm the passions of the moment. . . . Lord Lansdowne's letter will not only set people thinking, will pull people up, will give confidence to the democratic movements abroad and upset the enemy Governments, it will also give courage to the many who have already been thinking but who have been keeping their thoughts to themselves.¹

He would have been glad, he said, to see a Lansdowne Government, with a threefold programme of a democratic peace policy, restoration of civil liberties and a revised labour code at home. A Lansdowne Government of course was out of the question; but, although the letter was violently repudiated by public opinion in general, it had at least brought a public declaration of war aims within practicable range. And then, on December 13th, the new Bolshevik Government of Russia, which had achieved power on November 7th, and had at once sued for an armistice from Germany, published the secret treaties between the Allies, discovered in the Imperial archives. The peace advocates were infuriated by this confirmation of their darkest suspicions. The Governments, it appeared, had long since resolved

¹ *Forward*, December 8, 1917.

that this should be not only, perhaps even not so much, a war to restore Belgium and to save democracy, as to give Russia Constantinople and the Straits, partition Persia, hand southern Mesopotamia to Britain, and Syria to France, neutralise the Rhineland and buy Italy and Rumania at a price. All the more reason, then, they concluded, that we should declare our war aims to the world as speedily as possible, and that they should be aims for which our men would not be ashamed to have fought. All this—though the Secret Treaties were never published in the popular Press in this country—helped to bring the delegates to the Joint Conference of December 28th in an unusually receptive mood. The new central combination, of leaders of the orthodox with leaders of the I.L.P., of Henderson and Thomas with MacDonald and Smillie, proved decisive. The Memorandum on War Aims was carried by all but a two to one majority. The programme proposed included a League of Nations and the abolition of conscription and secret diplomacy; there were to be no annexations, and all territorial adjustments were to be based on self-determination. It was a courageous and far-sighted document, although the I.L.P. complained that the paragraphs on Belgium and Palestine did not go so far as Lord Lansdowne or President Wilson. After three and a half years of war, the doctrinal breach between MacDonald and his Party was visibly narrowing. It was too early for optimism, however. The indispensable German response to these gestures was not forthcoming. Whatever a small minority in Germany might think, no unequivocal promise of the full restoration of Belgium came from the German Government before the final military collapse. And without that, the only peace which the Allied Governments could expect seemed likely to be a

temporary truce with a Germany strengthened by thousands of square miles of territory and millions of new subjects, a Germany in which Prussian militarism would be immensely strengthened by its apparent triumph.

Events, however, continued to move more favourably to MacDonald's views. In January, in the Caxton Hall, the Prime Minister himself made a considered statement of British War Aims at two conferences with representatives of the trade unions. We must defend violated public law, he said, and restore Belgium; we must give freedom to parts of the Austrian Empire and her lost provinces to France; and there must be some international organisation as an alternative to war. In the same month President Wilson's celebrated address to Congress first laid down his Fourteen Conditions of Peace, which went far to disavow acquisitive ambitions. In January, 1918, too, the Annual Labour Conference unanimously accepted a resolution under five heads, which welcomed the recent statements by President Wilson and Mr. Lloyd George "in so far as they are in harmony with the War Aims of the British Labour Movement, and make for an honourable and Democratic Peace," demanded a joint statement of War Aims on similar lines by the Allied Governments and called upon the working-class organisations of the Central Powers to urge their Governments to follow suit. To this resolution, which was moved by Henderson and seconded by MacDonald, MacDonald's colleagues in the I.L.P. had put down some amendments, designed to render it even more uncompromising, but, under pressure, they were reluctantly withdrawn. The central position of MacDonald himself was more conspicuous than ever.

In February, a Conference of Allied Socialists in

London (a similar Conference in the previous August had been a hopeless failure) re-edited and amplified the Labour War Aims Memorandum—"the answer of democracy to autocracy" commented the *Manchester Guardian*, ". . . not of British democracy alone, but of the Labour forces of the Allied nations. The Governments have so far failed to draw up a common programme of war aims; the Conference has done it for them." And finally, at another Party Conference in June, 1918, Labour decided to end the by-election truce. The anomaly of its political relations was thus heightened; it continued to support the Government and (to MacDonald's regret) to be represented in the Cabinet, but now, not only were its treasurer and some of its members on the Opposition benches, it was free to attack the Government in the constituencies. But when, echoing President Wilson's Independence Day declaration, Mr. Lloyd George had told the troops in France that "we do not covet a single yard of German soil or desire to dispossess Germany of her rightful inheritance," it seemed as if twelve months' movement of British public opinion, though it had not diminished MacDonald's personal unpopularity, had gone far towards embracing his views. It almost looked as though Britain would be morally prepared for a democratic and a lasting peace.

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MacDonald himself, however, was not optimistic. The tense weeks of the final German offensive of Spring, 1918, drew by. The onrush slowed, wavered and was arrested. Half-stunned, but unbroken, by that tremendous impact, the Allies gathered themselves, turned, and then, amazingly, were driving the enemy before them, at a speed undreamed of since 1914. But in the weekly political diary which MacDonald kept in public in the

columns of *Forward* there was little trace of either alarm or elation at the high drama of the western front. For he could feel the decisive moment drawing on, the moment of which he had been thinking and speaking and writing since August, 1914, the supreme test of the peacemaking—and he was far from confident of the upshot. Despite the apparent movement of opinion in the last twelve months, he did not believe that there had been any substantial change in the simple outlook of the masses, or that they were likely to assist their rulers to resist the temptations of victory. His meetings during the last year of the war, it is true, were as enthusiastic as any he addressed during his entire political career—in November, 1917, “an absolutely open meeting of Leicester people,” he reported, “4,000 to 5,000 in bulk, was demonstrating with wild enthusiasm in favour of reason and common sense”—but he was too old a campaigner to mistake excited audiences for public opinion. And Havelock Wilson’s scamen could still hold up Henderson at Folkestone in October, and the Government refuse to allow Miss Bondfield to visit the United States. And Labour, although it had produced its War Aims Memorandum, had made no further effort to get the secret treaties revised, or to hasten the end of the war. Moreover, as the sky brightened over the western front, the policy, fatal, as he believed, of the knock-out blow seemed likely to revive. “We stand for a negotiated peace,” he reiterated, “when Germany is being driven back, as we did when she was advancing.” But, although he hoped, for a moment, that the great opportunity had come when Prince Max of Baden declared his policy as German Chancellor in early October, the prospects of a negotiated peace seemed steadily to fade. And so during these last breathless months he peered with growing

anxiety at the vague shapes which were emerging through the thinning mists. There was the League of Nations, for one. From the first he was alarmed lest the League, when it came, should fail because it was not democratic or all-inclusive.

The League should function through a popular body like a Parliament, not through Governments or Foreign Offices. . . . Again, those who say that the League can be brought into being only after a smashing military victory are depriving the League of every chance of success. The League should settle the peace and begin with the peace arrangements as the first evidence of its usefulness.¹

It would be fatal, he said, for the League to become a League of the Allies—"which subsequently says to Germany 'Come in, if you like.'"²

But larger, just now, than the League loomed the United States—whose psychology, he realised apprehensively, would be that of the first flush of belligerency.

What is the part America is to play? Over there they will want to reap some fruits which they can put in the storehouses of their history. They may not want territory, but they want achievement. They must feel they were actually in the fight, and they are just going through the same psychology as we did. They will, therefore, not be anxious to discuss peace—just yet. They are still on "the Golden Journey to Samarkand." They will supply us with fine phrases but will take their time in producing wise war aims. Meanwhile they will go on fighting.³

But for politicians in 1918 the United States meant President Wilson. For Labour politicians it should perhaps have meant also Mr. Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labour. But Mr. Gompers and his Federation had been a disappointment. On the

¹ *Forward*, July 10, 1918. ² *Labour Leader*, August 22, 1918.

³ *Forward*, September 21, 1918.

eve of their first appearance on the European stage MacDonald had speculated, somewhat pessimistically, on the part they were likely to play.

They come with fresh and untrained minds full of preconceived notions and quivering with high-sounding words which cloud reality like smoke. I do not know what wisdom they are likely to pick up. We have tried here to give them a few facts to digest and to get into their sonorous professions of faith and their adjectives and adverbs, but the Governments are looking after them pretty closely. They have taught us one or two things, however. America in the war is not to be anxious to see any sideway to peace. It is thinking exclusively in terms of military issues. . . . They tell you that every American is ready for the trenches. . . . One expected them to assume that America was to settle everything, but I think they saw that there were issues and problems of this war which had been hidden from them hitherto. . . . When they speak of the International, they do not mean what we mean. They think of a purely Trade Union body. To them Trade Unionism and Labour Democracy are one and the same thing. That, I hope, will be knocked out of their heads when they go to France.¹

Mr. Gompers and the Federation stood well to the right of their European colleagues, and for immediate purposes, indeed, probably to the right of the President of the United States. They were not perhaps chauvinists (as their British *confrères* were apt to suppose) so much as completely ignorant of European conditions, moving, as MacDonald wrote, "in a different hemisphere of thought." The Inter-Allied Conference of Labour and Socialist Parties, of September, 1918, was to have been Mr. Gompers' Conference, but alas! "Mr. Gompers," reported MacDonald, "has not the ear of the Conference." "The American voice, though speaking in English, has been more foreign than if it spoke in Greek." The

¹ *Forward*, May 11, 1918.

American Federation of Labour and the British Trade Unions between them, he thought, had ruined the Conference. But President Wilson was another matter. Of the President, MacDonald would have some penetrating observations to make when peacemaking had begun. For the moment he kept such misgivings as he cherished to himself, and was content to note with heartfelt gratitude the immense moral and political results when, in the last months of the war, Wilson's Fourteen Points began to reverberate round the world.

So soon as one of the belligerents began to state war-aims and reiterated the statement again and again in language that conciliated and did not provoke, so soon as secret diplomacy was abandoned and some one in authority spoke to the world, autocracy was doomed. The methods of democracy have awakened democracy. President Wilson's Fourteen Points shouted from the housetops, challenging at once German autocratic militarism and Allied secret treaties and Paris economic decisions, have won the war for democracy.¹

This was the method and this the language which he had advocated from the first. Wholly in tune with his views, too, was the temper and phrasing of an interview with Lord Milner published by the *Evening Standard* in that last October of the war—we must not pursue the war, said Milner, for punishment, reparation, or even territorial readjustments; we only want to end Prussian militarism. At last MacDonald was hearing his own language echoed from the seats of the mighty—but after four years of carnage, and after his own name had become a byword. But at least he felt sure that final victory was being hastened on by this novel diplomacy, almost as fast as by the arms of the Allies.

¹ *Forward*, October 26, 1918.

Of course an attempt will be made to put all this down to a successful offensive. The military success has not been without its effect. Our policy of secret treaties and tall talk has stifled German democracy and necessitated the continuation of the war. We have been like the Capitalist who first of all creates poverty and then takes credit for the charities by which he relieves it. But the German weakness which caused the retreat was political as well as military.¹

And so the last amazing scenes of the great drama were played out; the empire of the Hohenzollerns collapsed like a pack of cards, and, while the streets of London surged with roaring crowds, the curtain stole up, though the revellers had as yet no thought for that, upon the grey dawn of a new age.

MacDonald faced that vast interrogation mark still the most unpopular man in Britain. He had earned the bitter opposition, the hatred even, of many of his own colleagues. But there were few of them who did not, if reluctantly, respect him, even while they opposed. And to a large and influential minority of the Labour rank and file he had become an object of passionate devotion. Of all the leaders at the Emergency Election Conference of the Party in November, none was so enthusiastically received. At a Keir Hardie Memorial Demonstration of the I.L.P., in Edinburgh in September, he had been noticed in the body of the hall, and the audience had interrupted the proceedings to shout for him; and when he mounted the platform, there had been a wild outburst of enthusiasm. But these, after all, were gatherings of the Party, and what lingers in the memory as most symbolical perhaps of all his strange war-time experiences is the notorious "battle" of Plumstead Common, on August 31st, 1918. Before the meeting began there is said to have been a man in Beresford Square, Woolwich,

¹ *Forward*, October 26, 1918.

flourishing a handful of ten-pound notes, which he offered to any one who would "bring in MacDonald, dead or alive." There were sticks spiked with nails, and wagonettes laden with empty beer bottles, ready for the rioters. But there was also a body of kilted Highland soldiers who had arrived that morning at Victoria Station, and, hearing that MacDonald was in danger, had sacrificed a day's leave to see that he came to no harm. And then, speaking with the stones flying about his head, he had temporarily stilled the tossing sea of shouting, struggling men, and afterwards an enthusiastic body-guard had escorted him safely for several hundred yards to a waiting taxi—an inner phalanx of devoted supporters, with trench-stained khaki conspicuous among them, whose cheers drowned for the moment the shouts and execrations of the greater multitude beyond.

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To this day, the public knows next to nothing of what MacDonald thought, and said and did during the war. To some extent this may have been his own fault—occasionally, no doubt, he did not make sufficient allowance for either the abnormal sensitiveness or the abnormal obtuseness of a nation at war. Moreover, the complexity of his character was always apt to be reflected in his speeches and writings, in which normally the realist, but sometimes the mystic, had the upper hand. And his fundamental moderation always forebade him to take the clear-cut ingenuous views of a Keir Hardie. "So cheap, so easy," he would sometimes complain, in private, of that simple standpoint. There was something in the observation a close war-time associate of MacDonald's once made to me, "MacDonald *never* made himself quite clear enough"—something, but, it seems to me, after studying his war-time utter-

ances in bulk, not very much. For, to an incomparably greater degree, the public's ignorance of the real MacDonald was due to the all-powerful engines of misrepresentation and suppression which were inevitably set to work against him. And after he rose to power, there was a tacit agreement, among friend and foe alike, to let bygones be bygones—save always that many of his later followers, most of whom knew little and cared less for what he might have said or done in wartime, knew at least that he had shown himself ready to suffer for his opinions, and were heartened by that knowledge. But sooner or later history will have to pronounce upon his record, and it seems likely that, when it does, many verdicts will have to be revised. Under MacDonald's name in the index to Mr. Lloyd George's *War Memoirs*, will be found, among others, none of which are complimentary, the following entries. *Persistently opposes every recruiting effort; devotes his energies to the weakening of the nation's morale; a possible Kerensky; stirs up sedition; summons the Leeds Convention; thinks it better to be out of England when the Leeds resolutions are put into practice.* Every one of these statements appears to be demonstrably false. Some of them seem to be founded upon the common practice of treating MacDonald, who was not even a member of its executive, as identical with the I.L.P. and every allegation against it as a charge proved against him¹. The only justification, for example, in the text, for the assertion that MacDonald "stirred up sedition" seems to be an unproved allegation, by an unnamed correspondent of an unnamed colleague of Mr. Lloyd George's, that, in May, 1917, the objective of the I.L.P. was rioting, bloodshed, a general strike and

¹ Snowden was Chairman of the I.L.P. in 1917 but Mr. Lloyd George makes none of these charges against him.

W A R

revolution. For my own part, during the war, as an obscure subaltern, I was emphatically a Lloyd George, and not a MacDonald, man, and may claim to have come to examine this phase of MacDonald's history with particular detachment. But after reading an immense quantity of his speeches and writings of this time, the overwhelming impression left upon my mind is the prodigious gulf between the world's notion of him and the man himself. Now that the passions of those days are stilled, and the voices silent, the truth begins to appear. All through the war, what he had stood for was simply this—a lasting peace. Not many years would pass before his fellow-countrymen had bitter cause to rue that his warning words were carried, unheeded, down the wind.

X

EPILOGUE TO WAR

NOVEMBER, 1918—JUNE, 1919

THE war was ended, but for four years more it was to overshadow MacDonald's fortunes. Before the armistice was yet signed, a General Election loomed up. MacDonald was strong for Labour's severing the last links which bound it to the Coalition, and fighting as an independent force. He saw already that "the road is open to the Labour Party to become the Official Opposition." He derided the notion of "Free Trade Liberals co-operating with Protectionist Tories, friends of civil liberty hand in hand with militarists, Socialists lying down with Capitalist Profiteers and with one voice and mind giving the country its new start." The argument that, if Labour left the Coalition it would have no spokesmen at the Peace Conference seemed to him merely dishonest. Had not Mr. Lloyd George promised in December, 1916, at a meeting at the War Office, at which MacDonald and other Labour Leaders had put various searching questions to him, before the decision to support his Government was taken, that Labour should be represented at the peacemaking? But now "when Labour asks its reward, it is informed that it must do something more. It is only to be represented at the Peace Congress if it commits itself to a recon-

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struction Coalition." Labour was divided on this issue, the Parliamentary Party being for coalition, the Executive for independence. There was an Emergency Conference on November 2nd. A speech from Bernard Shaw, curiously enough, was the success of the occasion. No one was more warmly cheered than MacDonald. And the independents had it by more than two to one. Labour was free once more—to make what it could of the new age. Almost at once the Election was upon them.

For MacDonald it was the ugliest he had yet had to fight. The pent-up resentments of four years were let loose upon him. All "the pacifists," and above all MacDonald, must be driven out of public life. In Leicester West (the constituency had been divided by the Redistribution Act of 1918) his opponent was a former Marxian Socialist of the I.L.P., who had presumably earned his sobriquet of "Bald-headed" Green by his political impetuosity rather than his physical characteristics, but figured now as an ultra-patriotic Coalition candidate under the ambiguous banner of a short-lived National Democratic League. On the once dominant Liberalism of Leicester, which played but "a subordinate, kitchenmaid's part" in this campaign, MacDonald pronounced a significant obituary.

There was a time when Leicester Liberalism was a fine strong robust faith expounded by strong men of independent minds and massive ideas, and I sometimes fear that my respect for its past led occasionally to misunderstandings as to my own position. My study at home is hung with Peter Alfred Taylor's Collection of Cromwell's portraits, on my shelves are some of J. A. Picton's books upon Democracy. I never could dissociate these giants from Leicester Liberalism. Their spirit brooded over the town. Our politics have been haunted by the ghosts of the mighty

dead. Now the feeble living have banished these big spirits, the natural union of exhausted Liberalism and triumphant Toryism has been accomplished. The past is really past.¹

All the ugliest and falsest stories of the last four years were revived and spread broadcast. A hostile cleric compiled a catalogue of apparent contradictions from MacDonald's war-time utterances. A host of canvassers denounced him as a pro-German, a traitor, a loose-liver, a Bolshevik and an atheist. To all of which it was almost impossible to reply. As nearly as can ever be possible in an election campaign, he was silenced. The Press unanimously declined to report his speeches. At first indeed it looked as though there would even be no speeches to report, for a determined attempt to break up his meetings all but succeeded. His opponent was welcomed to speak in the local factories in working hours, but no employer would admit MacDonald. A few prominent Free Churchmen were bold enough to publish a manifesto of support for him, but were at once denounced by the Free Church Council. After a few days the attempt to silence him broke down, and his supporters, despite his expostulations, began to carry the war into the enemy's territory. His last four meetings indeed were reported in the *Labour Leader* as "indescribable scenes of loyalty and affection." And by the end of the campaign, local betting, which had started at five to one against MacDonald, was actually two to one in his favour. J. H. Thomas courageously came over from Derby to support him, though Barnes, who had remained in the Government when the other Labour Ministers resigned, sent a letter of support to his opponent. The other Labour leaders left him severely alone. Bernard Shaw, however, appeared on his platform, and, after an

¹ *Forward*, December 14, 1918.

enthusiastic meeting in a huge hall packed to overflowing, asked, "Is there any real chance?" "Not the least," replied MacDonald, "the women will beat me." Many of the better-paid artisans and of the soldiers home from the front were for him. But the rest of the electorate, and particularly the women, were bitterly hostile. In 1918 female suffrage was giving the first public exhibition of its powers, and, whatever else may be said for it, it was certainly not living up to its advocates' familiar claim that women would always vote for peace. At this election at any rate the newly-enfranchised matriarchs relentlessly hunted down the pacifists. "The haunting memory," wrote MacDonald, "is of the women—bloodthirsty, cursing their hate, issuing from the courts and alleys crowded with children, reeking with humanity—the sad flotsam and jetsam of wild emotion."¹ Democracy was certainly not at its most impressive. "This is the fetish you worship," observed an anti-Parliamentarian friend of MacDonald's, sardonically. "The very gods go mad sometimes," he replied stoutly. But in private he sometimes reflected more pessimistically—"What respect can we pay," he wrote, before the campaign was over, "to decisions come to in this way?"

He went through the ordeal with an almost dreamlike sense of detachment.

I forget that I am in it or have any concern in it. I look on as a mere spectator of the intensely interesting drama. The cars scurry hither and thither. Poverty and debauchery hob-nob with affluence and flush. Children showing their skins through their tatters run yelling amidst the rush. Some one breaks the spell by a shake of the hand and fervent wish of good luck, and I am reminded that I am the centre of it all—the object of the offence and the defence. My

¹ *Forward*, December 21, 1918.

opponent, a pure Marxian Socialist to whom the I.L.P. was but milk and water, whizzes past embowered in Union Jacks, the trophy of expectant Capitalism, the pride of a strenuous reaction.¹ . . .

But after the first few hours he had had no illusions as to the result. Only the completeness of his defeat staggered him—he was out by 14,000. This was the darkest moment of his political career. The spectacular *débâcle* at Leicester was hailed with shouts of triumph in the Press. MacDonald, said the world, is finished. And indeed, execrated by his fellow-countrymen at large, and with his own Party more than half hostile to him, he certainly could not count upon returning to public life. Far worse, everything he cared for had gone down in the Election. Labour had increased its representation in Parliament to sixty-one, including three new I.L.P. men, but all MacDonald's old colleagues of the I.L.P. or U.D.C. had been defeated by huge majorities. It almost seemed that there was not a shred of substantial achievement left to show for four years of heart-searing sacrifice and effort. He had thrown away career and friendships in a protracted attempt to prepare some portion of the nation at least to rise, morally and mentally, to this supreme opportunity of the Peace Conference. But what hope was there now of avoiding a Carthaginian peace? Slowly and painfully the public opinion which might have sustained a genuine peacemaker had been mobilised—the Lansdowne letter, President Wilson's Fourteen Points, the Labour War Aims Memorandum, the great Albert Hall Demonstration of November 14th (when, though the organisers had feared to put his name upon the bills, the audience had clamoured “Ramsay! Ramsay!” till at last he rose to speak), the Labour Election manifesto

¹ *Forward*, December 21, 1918.

with its solemn declaration "the Peace which Labour demands is a Peace of International Conciliation"—each in turn had seemed for a moment a triumph for that indispensable spirit of moderation, for which he had fought so hard. In his declaration to the trade unions in the Caxton Hall in January of 1918, Mr. Lloyd George himself had appeared to be a convert to that outlook. And in December, 1918, that saner public opinion, which MacDonald had toiled so long to build, was still there—if only Mr. Lloyd George had chosen to appeal to it. But Mr. Lloyd George had not given democracy a chance. He had taken it off its guard, in that first wild moment of hysterical relief when a long strain is lifted. He, or his supporters, had appealed to much meaner motives. And in the wild and whirling Election, the baser passions of war-time, half pent-up while war lasted, had seemed suddenly to cast off all restraint. The Prime Minister had been given a huge majority and a free hand. The course seemed set for the "militarist peace," against which MacDonald had poured out so many warnings. At Vienna, a century ago, the aristocratic oligarchs had made a singularly moderate use of their victory over Napoleonic France. They had, after all, their traditions, and they produced, on the whole, a gentlemen's peace. In December, 1918, there seemed little hope that the democracies would emulate them. Is it possible that, if Labour had not left the Coalition, if its concerted demand for "a peace of conciliation" had been made from within the fortress of Government, the Election might have been fought, and the peace made, in another spirit, and Europe saved from what was to come? Impossible to say. All we know is that there was a fund of self-restraint in the nation, a deep vein of conciliatory common sense, which MacDonald and others had laboured to develop

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against this very emergency; but that our rulers preferred to look elsewhere, and in due course led us down other paths.

* * * * *

The one remaining hope was President Wilson.

Wilson in France was at once put at the head of the democracy. There was no Clemenceau, no Lloyd George, no Allies—only Wilson. . . . The feeling is that if he fails us everything is lost, and that until he does fail us we should trust him. . . .¹

When the President was in England, shortly before the Election ballot boxes were opened on December 28th, he was alarmed to learn from the British Labour politicians whose hopes of the Peace most nearly matched his own, that they had every expectation of defeat. And in the United States, too, it was beginning to appear, the idealists were in a minority. Before the old year ended, MacDonald shrewdly pointed out the ambiguity of the President's position.

He never shared his responsibility with his fellow countrymen or his Cabinet. In his own private room, in front of his little typewriter (which has become a historical piece of furniture), he drafted his speeches and his messages. He presented the accomplished fact. Now he is isolated at the moment of supreme crisis, when he requires an unchallengeable authority and confidence. . . . He stands as a person in the limelight, not as an authorised ambassador of the people.²

By the end of January, the representatives of the Allies were in Paris, beginning to wield the dangerous weapons of omnipotence. The blockade had not been lifted. Russia, Germany and large areas of Central Europe were

¹ *Forward*, December 28, 1918. ² *Ibid.*

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in the grip of famine, disease and frightful civil disorders. "I cannot help believing," wrote MacDonald,

that the Allied Governments are not at all anxious to put an end to the civil strife in Berlin. The longer Germany is in disorder, the more spoil does Germany offer to the conquerors. A German Government at the Peace Conference might be awkward. Its just interests would have to be considered, and too much justice at the Peace table would upset many private arrangements.¹

The sumptuous Paris hotels harboured no spokesmen of Germany, or of Labour. Labour, thought MacDonald, was insulted by not being admitted to the inner councils of the Peacemakers; but it is difficult to see how, once out of the Government Coalition, and therefore not eligible as a political Party, it could have been represented as one Interest—among others. There remained its own International Conference at Berne, where eighty delegates from twenty-one countries, including the defeated Central Powers, began business on February 3rd. All through the war, MacDonald had striven to keep in touch with the melancholy fragments of the International; some of the gestures which had earned him most unpopularity—his reference to "our German friends," his attempt to accept Kerensky's invitation to Russia, his support of the Stockholm project—had been attempts to maintain contact with foreign Socialists. And now the appearance at Berne of these eighty delegates, among them several Ministers of the frail, new republics of Central Europe, seemed the only light on a dark horizon, the last hope that the war should not breed endless new wars. For MacDonald's conception of the Berne International was that it should make, upon the great issues now before the official Peace Conference,

¹ *Forward*, January 18, 1919.

the sort of pronouncements, conciliatory, forward-looking and clement, for which he had argued all through the war. And then, transmitted to Paris, it was just possible that this ground-plan of a democratic treaty might influence the Peace-Makers themselves. For the key to the significance of Berne was that the new Central European Governments themselves were represented there. These men were professed democrats. They had disowned defeated Prussianism, and resisted it before it was defeated. There were no Germans at the Paris peace-making, and already the fatal cry was heard there that the only Germany was the old Germany, and that the old Germany would never keep the peace unless it were permanently crippled. But there *was* a new Germany, and the new Germany was at Berne. The one hope of lasting peace was to maintain the new Germany in being. The one hope was for the victors to find the courage not to discredit the struggling new democracy with its own people by a vindictive peace. Only if Berne could teach Paris this, would the war not have been fought in vain. But the democracies, relaxing luxuriously from the long strain, were taking little enough note of what was going on at Paris. As to Berne, they were scarcely aware that it existed. The preliminaries were not altogether unhopeful. On his way there, in Paris, MacDonald had heard optimistic—indeed, over-optimistic—reports of the early discussions among the Government delegations. Secret treaties were said to be “disappearing, like the snow on the streets,” and a friend told him that, at a Committee addressed by an influential British representative, an American journalist had whispered to him “Rather like Ramsay MacDonald’s speeches, isn’t it?” First impressions of Berne, did not, it is true, suggest that the rulers of the world at Paris

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were likely to be ready to learn wisdom from the assembling Conference. It swarmed with suspicious journalists and secret agents, sent to report on the delegates to their respective Governments. The female *agent provocateur* who had already failed to entrap MacDonald in London, had left a week earlier.

Whilst there she was in the pay of the French Government, but I saw a notorious friend of hers whom she used as a bait for me. The other was still at Berne, beginning to look thin and scraggy. . . . I never saw her without a great pity filling my heart. . . . The representatives of British Labour were spied upon at Berne as though they were criminals out on tickets of leave.¹

Fortunately the spy-work was not very efficient—one agent being even careless enough to drop his notes in the street, where they were picked up, read with considerable amusement by the subjects of his investigations and by them politely transmitted to the British authorities in Berne. But it was heartening to find the German and Austrian delegates—several of them Ministers or Presidents—ready for disarmament and a League of Nations. A heavy indemnity they expected, but not so heavy that it could not be paid off in a comparatively short time. “If I wished for revenge upon the Entente,” observed one of them, “I should encourage it to impose upon Germany an indemnity so great that it could not be paid for many years. That would keep Germany united and resentful, and it would weaken the Entente and weary it. Then my chance would come. But I do not wish this at all. I want peace.”² After tiresome preliminary negotiations, the Conference began its business with the inevitable wrangle over war-guilt. After a French resolution

¹ *Forward*, March 1, 1919. ² *Forward*, February 15, 1919.

had declared that the dogs of war had been let loose by a few individuals in Central Europe, and the Germans had retorted that they stood for a new Germany, guiltless of the crimes of the old regime, it was decided, a trifle optimistically perhaps, that a later Conference should finally resolve the tangle. A debate upon the nascent League ensued, and it was resolved that it must be founded upon a just and genuine Peace and (since Labour and Socialism were often minorities) should be constituted of delegates from Parliaments, not Governments, and from all Parties in the various Parliaments. The League, decided the delegates, must control national armaments until all national armaments had been abolished. Such was the brave mood of early 1919. And the Conference went on to lay down, as best it could in the limited time at its disposal, a series of general propositions as to the coming Peace. Self-determination, they declared in effect, must be the guiding principle—"the right of the victor to the spoils of war" was emphatically repudiated. But there were shadows even on the optimistic idealism of Berne. In International affairs the delegates were showing themselves much more generously far-sighted than the victors at Paris—they were saying over again, on the eve of the Peace, what MacDonald had said all through the war. But when it came to the great domestic issue, unanimity disappeared, and their deliberations were bedevilled by the ominous interrogation mark of Russia. These discussions, postponed, not resolved, were destined to spread until they had destroyed the reviving International. The majority, including of course MacDonald and the British delegation, insisted, as democrats, on repudiating dictatorship, even the dictatorship, euphemistically ascribed to the proletariat, now patently established in

Russia. The minority, led by Adler of Austria and Longuet of France, desired to hold the door ajar for Lenin (who recognised neither the Conference nor its Russian delegates) to enter, if and when he would. It declined therefore to pass any judgment now, and in due course, in order to sit more comfortably upon its fence, established a rival organisation of its own, the Vienna, or Two and a Half, International, as it came to be known, midway between Berne, (the Second), and Moscow's rigidly disciplined Third. Thus the curtain rose upon the tremendous struggle which was to tear apart every Socialist Party on the Continent, and to engage MacDonald in efforts as sustained and courageous as those, which had just concluded, of war-time.

Meanwhile MacDonald and his colleagues pursued what had become his last hope of saving something from the wreckage of the war. The Berne Conference had appointed a Permanent Commission, of which MacDonald was a member, to continue its work. A delegation from this Commission, of which MacDonald was again a member, laid the Berne resolutions before the redoubtable Clemenceau on February 16th. Clemenceau, who received them, ominously enough, at the Ministry of War, seems to have confined himself to the oracular observation that in many respects the resolutions were in agreement with the views of himself and his colleagues. For the rest, their documents should lie on the table of the Peace Conference. The phrase, so familiar to Parliamentarians, was not encouraging. But Berne had not quite shot its bolt. The Commission met again at Amsterdam on April 26th. There MacDonald addressed two huge crowds on May Day, and there he met the German Socialist Haase, who

told me that he and his friends would sign almost anything to get peace, but that there were things he would not accept. He would not agree to a Polish Danzig, to a French occupation of the Saar basin, to an indemnity that meant economic slavery. Nor would he accept terms which amounted, on the whole, to insult as well as punishment.¹

A harsh peace, added Haase, would strengthen both the anarchist left and the militarist right. This time the Commission drafted a series of much more clearly-defined resolutions. They have a certain melancholy interest to-day.

German-Austria . . . has the absolute right either to preserve its independence, or as the majority of the population now demands, to unite the whole of the Austro-German territories to Germany.

It is important to reject all proposals to take from Germany territory, forming part of the Eastern and Western provinces of Prussia and inhabited by Germans in order to cede it to the Polish State, with the object of giving the latter access to the Baltic Sea.

The International Conference protests against a policy which would deprive Germany of her Colonies.

Such sentences as these may suggest the spirit of the whole document, and how unlikely it was to commend itself at Versailles. It was the spirit of the speech with which, at the Labour Conference two months later, MacDonald rang down the curtain on his war pilgrimage. The long struggle was over then. The men who held the destiny of the world in their hands had rejected almost everything he had striven for. The war had saved Europe from the dictatorship of a militarist oligarchy in Prussia. The Peace was to ensure that it would revive. "The provisions of the document in front of me are not merely a punishment to a nation as a whole,"

¹ *Forward*, May 17, 1919.

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he had written. "They amount to an attempt to destroy it." The faith of Wilson, the pledges of Lloyd George, Labour's War Aims Memorandum—all seemed to have gone by the board. As he had written on May 24:

The view of a cynical, well-informed man is—The terms are drafted to save the faces of the Allied Premiers. They can say to their people, "We have satisfied your wild dreams" but they know perfectly well that whether the terms are disputed or not, they will have to be revised, and the odium of revision will be put upon those who succeed these men in office.¹

And now MacDonald stood up to reiterate, unrepentant, what he had preached since the first shot was fired in 1914, and now there were none to taunt him with cries of "Traitor!" Already by June, 1919, in that Labour Conference at least, the uncomfortable truths in what he said were beginning to come home to men's bosoms. Of course, he told them, a victorious Germany would have perpetrated a far more iniquitous peace than this. Of that Brest-Litovsk was sufficient proof. "But neither in making war, nor in conducting war, nor in making peace was he going to copy German militarism." Let them imagine the results of such a German peace imposed on Britain.

It would have been a rankling sore in their hearts, it would have been a disgrace, it would have been something they would have taught their children to be ashamed of, it would have been something they would have taught their grandchildren to revolt against.

Let them not deceive themselves with the illusion that this peace was a just punishment for misdeeds. The

¹ The prophetic quality in these words will be apparent to any one who has studied the latest of Mr. Lloyd George's *Memoirs*.

burden of her own misdeeds would be Germany's punishment. To confuse passion with punishment was not justice, but revenge.

Yet they put millions of Hungarians under Poles, millions of Germans under the Czechs, they cut and carved the territories of Europe. . . . They could compel them to sink their traditions, to bend their necks so that the foot might be pressed upon them, but the moment the victors became weak, the moment the war passions passed, the moment that the alliances made by war were broken up, at that moment the subdued enemy looked at the victors' weakness and began to plot and plan to put them into the position into which they had been put. . . . That was the sort of thing that raised the passions from which militarism grew. They could preach and pray and talk and express their intention until they were black in the face, and, in the end, the thing they had said they had been out to suppress grew round about them like a forest, and one fine day their children or grandchildren would be called out to do exactly what they themselves had done. Was that going to be the end of this struggle? In God's name let them swear together that it would not.

Once again, for the hundredth time, he had uttered his warning against the blindness of passion. Once again, he had prophesied that from the sowing of dragon seed there can only spring armed men. But it was too late. The die had been cast, by other hands. Perhaps not even a national strike would have availed to mend the peace terms, and, in any case, as MacDonald ruefully observed, "more men will strike for a penny an hour than will do it to prevent their grandchildren being killed in the next war." There were protests, of course, and manifestoes—from soldiers as well as from politicians and Peace societies—but of what use were they now? MacDonald, who so remarkably avoided bitterness all

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hrough the war, came near to bitterness as he observed his snowstorm of belated manifestoes. "The respectable people," he wrote, on May 31,

Are now coming out with their protests. They, good people, thought they could support hasty appetites during the war, and have the refined pleasure of seeing an angelic Peace at the end of it. "We," they say in effect, "who have no stain on our characters and who taught you that it was a war to end war . . . must now inform you that we have been deceived." What the academical people who produced the latest groan against the Peace settlement did not see was that Peace has an organic connection with war, and that the only part they were destined to play was to be the innocent misleaders of opinion during the war and the ineffectiye protesters after it. I prefer the good, rough, constructive common sense of the Independent Labour Party.

Tens of thousands, who had served loyally through the war, and left the peace to their rulers, realised, with a sudden shock of disillusionment, that this was not the peace they had been fighting for. In all good faith, as MacDonald once put it to "a recruiting Socialist," they had "given purely military service"—and so far his prophecies of the consequences had been exactly fulfilled. By so doing (he had written, in 1916)—

You are adding volume and confidence to a public opinion which will not support you when you think the time has come to change that diplomacy. . . . If the new diplomacy is not settled and organised now, the conditions of peace will be arranged by the existing diplomacy and you will find yourself in the toils of international hate and fear, of adjustments of territory, of *ententes* and alliances, of plots and menaces. . . .

It was all over. From that first August till the last

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hope faded in May, 1919, he had worked, and suffered, to prepare opinion for a peace of conciliation, and his words had been derided as folly or treachery. It is not so easy to deride them as folly or treachery to-day.

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